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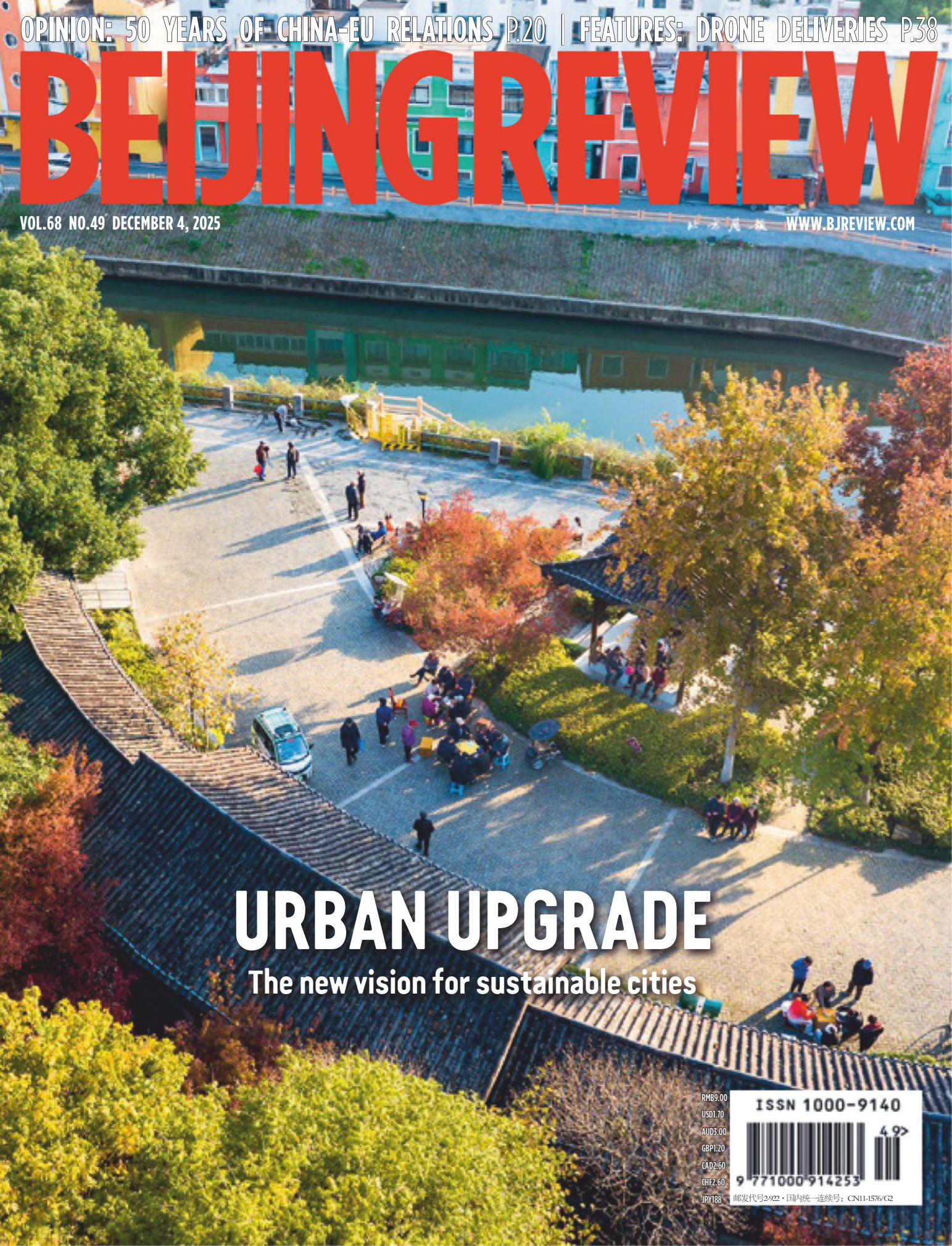

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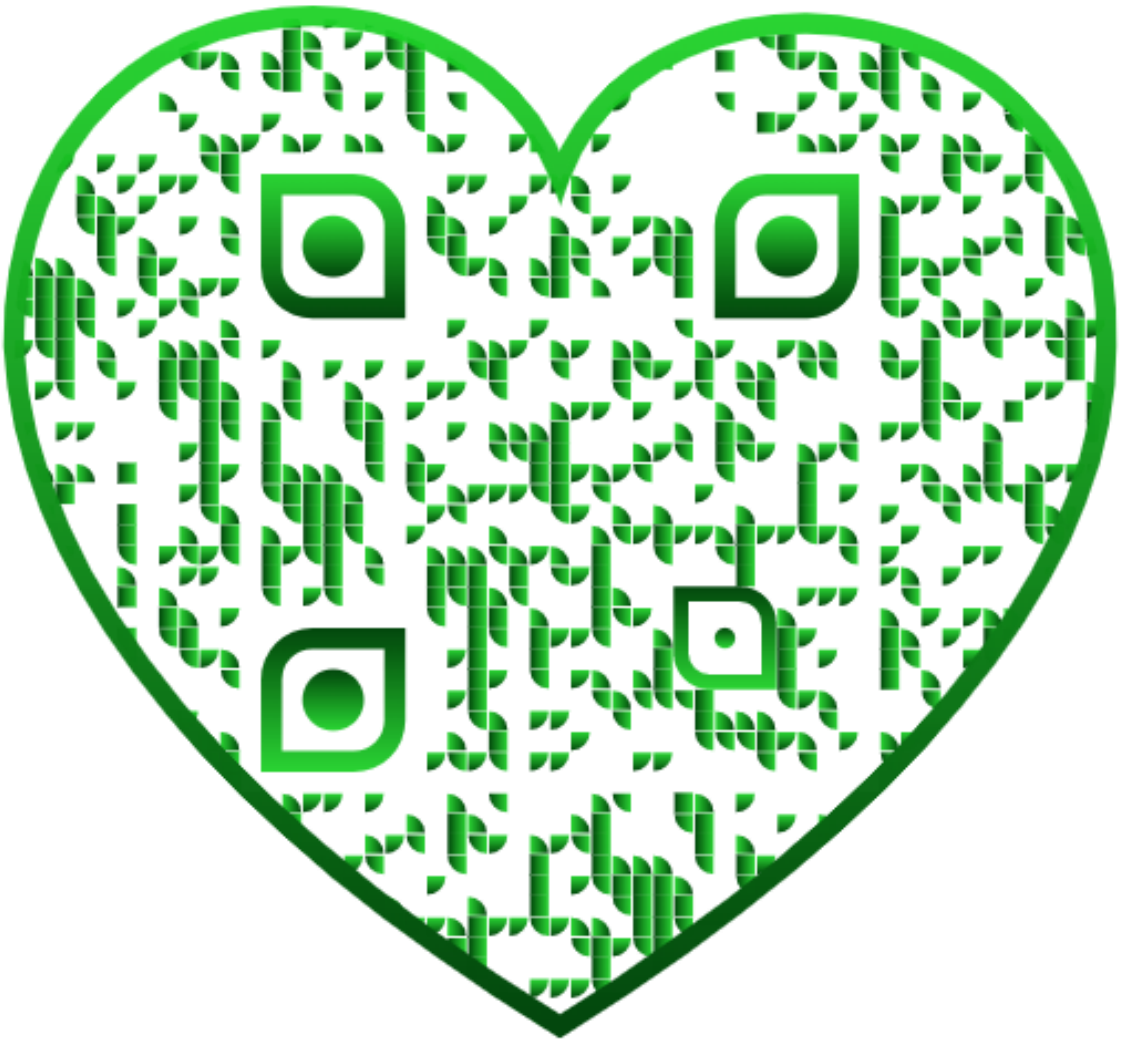

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CONTENTS

EDITOR'S DESK
02 The Urban Imperative

THIS WEEK

COVER STORY
12 A New Urban Life
Cities are becoming smarter, cleaner and more livable

16 Renewed Roots
Urban renewal and cultural preservation in Guangzhou

OPINION
18 The Reason for China's Rage
Japan's talks of military intervention must be met with firm opposition

20 China-EU Relations at 50
Challenges, opportunities and the road ahead

22 The Business of Peace
Europe's Ukraine counterproposal challenges Trump's peace plan

24 Why the World Could Not Wait For America
Climate cooperation moves ahead without U.S. support

26 A Declaration of Independence
G20 sets agenda despite U.S. opposition

28 Toward a Better Future
Consul general in São Paulo talks green cooperation with Brazil

30 The Urban Reset
Expert opinions on sustainable urbanization

FEATURES
32 Powering Partnership
China-Brazil cooperation on green energy

34 The Shared Green Dream
Sustainability and storytelling bring cultures together in Brazil

38 Fast Freight Takes Flight
The growing use of drone logistics in south China

40 The New Silk Road
The strategy strengthening the sericulture supply chain

42 Kuliang Revisited
New documentary explores a mountain with a history of friendship

44 Wild and Wired
Wilderness contest pushes physical limits and broadcasting boundaries

CULTURE
46 Where History Comes Alive
Exhibition explores Han and Tang dynasties influence on Chinese civilization

EXPAT'S EYE
48 China's Digital Heart
Technology brings cultures closer in Chengdu

Cover Photo: A park in Wuhu, Anhui Province, on November 24 (VCG)

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The Urban Imperative

One of the recommendations made in October by the Communist Party of China Central Committee for formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development (2026-30) has attracted widespread attention among the Chinese public: "We should continue to tap the full potential of cities, make a strong push to advance urban renewal and build people-centered modern cities that are innovative, livable, beautiful, resilient, culturally rich and smart." The reason for the buzz is the boom in urban infrastructure construction the recommendations are expected to bring and the resulting economic development.

Urban renewal is a core strategy in China's ongoing urbanization process. It transcends mere physical transformation, representing a comprehensive process essential for building sustainable cities of the future.

China's urban population reached 67 percent of the total at the end of 2024, with urban development shifting from the stage of large-scale incremental expansion to the stage of improving the quality and efficiency of existing resources. But many Chinese cities, especially those that have expanded rapidly, are confronted with severe urban challenges, such as aging infrastructure, outdated water supply, drainage, gas and electricity networks, poor roads, and substandard living conditions. Old residential communities lack modern facilities, parking spaces, elevators and green spaces. Urban renewal aims to alleviate these problems, enhancing the carrying capacity of cities and making them more livable.

Urban renewal is also a crucial engine for stimulating domestic demand and promoting economic growth. Renewal projects will drive huge private investment in multiple industries such as construction, building materials, design and real estate, thus stimulating investment. In addition, by renovating old factories and neighborhoods, new business forms including cultural and creative industries, technology and tourism can be introduced to achieve industrial upgrading and cultivate new drivers of growth.

However, improving people's wellbeing and enhancing their sense of happiness and fulfillment are the core goals of urban renewal in China. Renovating or replacing dilapidated or old buildings, installing elevators and improving kitchen and bathroom facilities can directly enhance people's quality of life. In areas under renewal, elderly care, child care, medical care, education and community service facilities will be upgraded to improve public services. The optimization of community environments and the expansion of community spaces will lead to greater community cohesion and social harmony. **BR**

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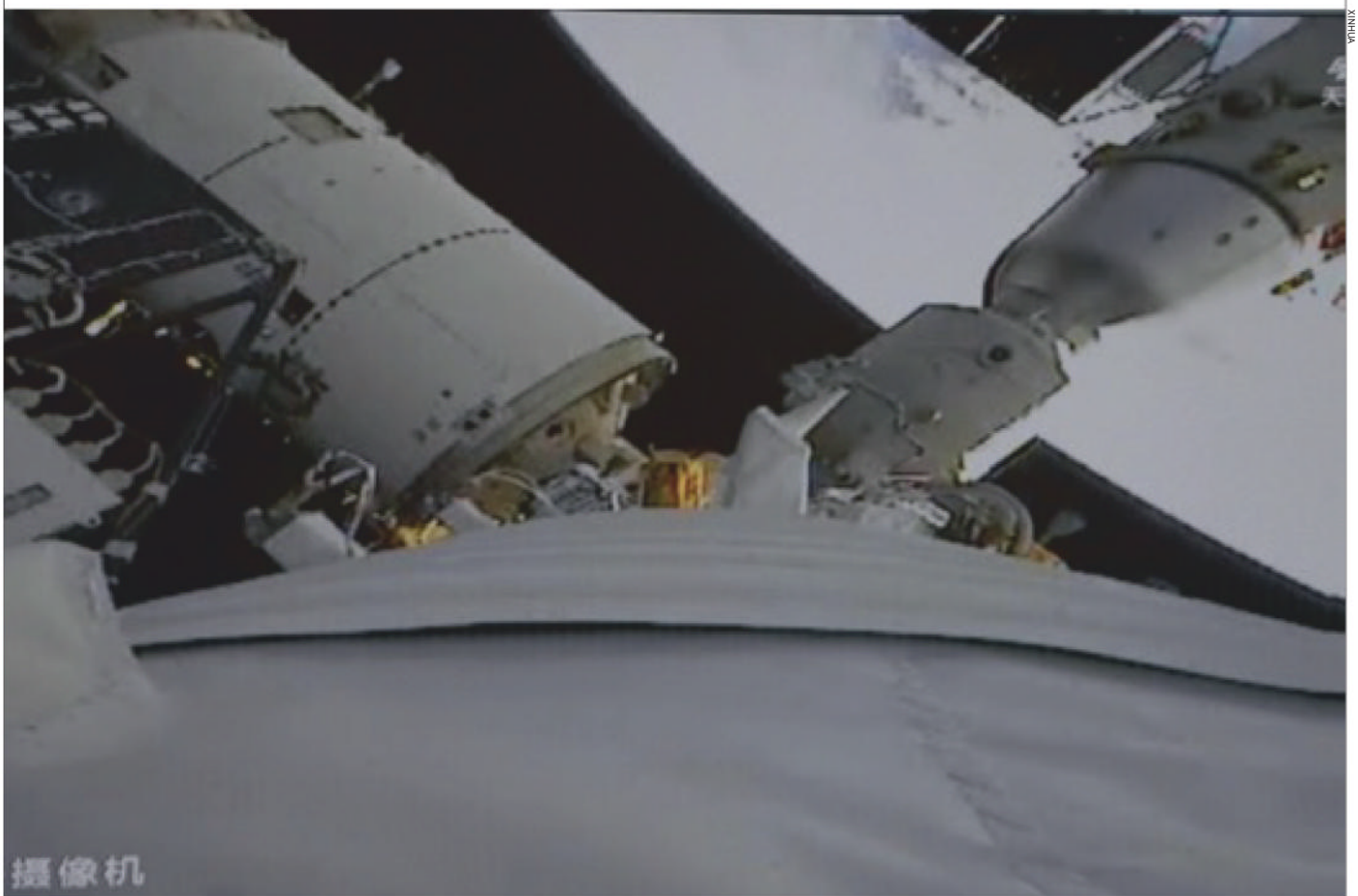


XINHUA

URGENT MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

China's *Shenzhou-22* spaceship docks with the *Tiangong* space station on November 25. Originally scheduled for launch in April 2026, the *Shenzhou-22* was sent as a return vehicle for the astronauts currently in the space station, after *Shenzhou-20* suffered damage suspected to have resulted from a collision with space debris and its crew returned to Earth on *Shenzhou-21*.

XINHUA

Aircraft Maintenance

Staff of the Grand China Aviation Maintenance Co. Ltd., a subsidiary of Hainan Airlines Group, perform maintenance on an aircraft at the Hainan Free Trade Port One-Stop Aircraft Maintenance Base in Haikou, Hainan Province, on November 21.

Domestic Violence

The Supreme People's Procuratorate (SPP), China's top procuratorate, said on November 25 more than 500 defendants in domestic violence criminal cases have been sentenced to life imprisonment or more severe penalties over the past five years.

Chinese prosecutors have stepped up supervision over the handling of domestic violence cases to protect women's rights and interests. Since 2021, Chinese procuratorial agencies have approved the arrest of more than 2,800 suspects involved in relevant crimes and have prosecuted more than 3,400, according to the SPP.

"Domestic violence is not only an infringement on the legitimate rights and interests of family members, but is also harmful to social order and public interests," Ge Xiaoyan, Deputy Procurator-General of the SPP, said.

The SPP pledged greater efforts to punish criminal offenses against women in accordance with the law. It also vowed to carry out regular crackdowns on the trafficking of women and seriously punish sexual assault crimes.

China revised the Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women and put it into force on January 1, 2023, protecting women in a wide range of areas, including gender equality, employment and maternity insurance.

Curbing Tax Evasion

The Supreme People's Court (SPC), China's top court, has reiterated the importance of cracking down on crimes related to tax collection and management, calling for stronger judicial efforts to safeguard national tax revenues and maintain market order.

The SPC released eight notable tax-related cases on November 24, emphasizing the need to reinforce tax compliance and guide lawful tax practices through judicial measures. It urged courts nationwide to focus on combating the use of dual contracts for tax evasion purposes and the profiteering from reselling invoices through online platforms.

Yin and *yang* contracts, or dual contracts, involve producing two documents for the same agreement. One reflects the parties' true intentions, while the other lists a lower amount to be submitted to tax authorities.

In March 2024, the SPC and the SPP declared these contracts to be a tax evasion method in a judicial interpretation aimed at helping judges and prosecutors address increasingly covert and difficult to detect illegal practices.

Science Forum

The Greater Bay Area Science Forum 2025 will be held in Guangdong Province and Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions between December 6 and 8 in a bid to advance the building of an international scientific and technological innovation hub in the region. The Greater Bay Area is a city cluster encompassing nine cities in Guangdong and Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions.

The opening ceremony will take place at the Nansha International Convention and Exhibition Center in Guangzhou on December 7, gathering high-ranking officials and prominent representatives from the business and academic fields from home and abroad, Guo Yile, Deputy Secretary-General of the Guangdong Provincial Government, said.

Sub-forums will be held in Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Yangjiang, and Huizhou in Guangdong and in Hong Kong and Macao, focusing on emerging and future industry technologies, Guo said at a news conference in Guangzhou on November 26.

During the forum, the Chinese Academy of Sciences will deliver a report on the performance of the major scientific and technological infrastructure it has jointly built in Guangdong, Ren Hai, Director of the academy's Guangzhou branch, said.

Ice Building

The annual construction of the world's largest ice-and-snow theme park, Harbin Ice-Snow World, began in Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang Province, on November 25.

Work on the park, which is

set to span a record 1.2 million square meters this winter, began three days earlier than last year. About 10,000 workers will use some 200,000 cubic meters of ice stored for over 10 months for building the ice sculptures and buildings, as rivers have not yet fully frozen this winter, according to Cong Peiyu, Director of the design and development department of Harbin Ice-Snow World Co. Ltd.

The early start and use of reserved ice will help the park open as scheduled in late December, Cong said.

The park drew more than 3.56 million guests over its 68-day operation during last season, which ran from December 21, 2024 to February 26 this year.

Harbin, often called China's "ice city," has turned its long, cold winters into a major tourist attraction. Last winter, the city welcomed a record 90.36 million visitors, generating 137.22 billion yuan ($19 billion) in revenue, a 16.6-percent increase year on year.

Giant Panda Population

China's population of captive giant pandas has nearly doubled over the past decade, reaching 808, head of the National Forestry and Grassland Administration, Liu Guohong, said on November 21.

This growth has established a sustainable breeding group for the species, Liu said at the Global Panda Partners Conference 2025 held in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province, from November 20 to 22.

The population represents a significant rise from the 422 recorded in late 2015. Liu attributed the growth to improved breeding research, including establishing a national innovation alliance for giant Panda conservation, which pools resources for the study of key issues such as genetic diversity.

China has improved the protection of giant panda habitats. Seventy-three isolated nature reserves were integrated into the Giant Panda National Park, which covers 22,000 square km.

Known as the "hometown of giant pandas," Sichuan has the largest panda habitat in the world and is home to over 70 percent of China's wild giant panda population.

College Graduates

The Ministry of Education said on November 20 the total number of college graduates nationwide in 2026 is estimated to be around 12.7 million, which will mean a surge of 480,000 from 2025.

In light of the situation, the ministry has arranged localities and higher education institutions to launch a specific campaign on improving the quality and expanding the scale of employment for college graduates in 2026.

To advance the high-quality and full employment of the graduates, the campaign focuses on efforts such as supporting entrepreneurship to drive employment, deepening the integration of industries and education to further align supply and demand and ensuring support for needy groups through targeted assistance, the ministry said.

Since the start of the autumn semester this year, more than 12 million job opportunities have been gathered and offered to graduates via a series of campus recruitment activities carried out by universities across the country, according to the ministry.

XINHUA

A Flourishing Industry

A worker sorts potted flowers at a smart agriculture demonstration park in Xingqing District of Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, on November 25. In recent years, the district has leveraged its abundant sunshine to develop the floriculture industry, creating jobs for local farmers.

XINHUA

World Hello Day

Students show greeting cards made to celebrate the World Hello Day, which falls on November 21 each year, at a primary school in Qingdao, Shandong Province, on November 20.

Green Electricity Certificates

China issued 370 million green electricity certificates in October, bringing its total issuance in the first 10 months of 2025 to 2.478 billion, official data showed on November 25.

Of the certificates issued in October, 158 million were classified as tradable, accounting for 42.61 percent of the month's total, according to the National Energy Administration (NEA).

Green electricity is electricity generated from renewable energy sources such as wind, solar or biomass power.

Trading activity remained robust in October, with 66.7 million certificates changing hands nationwide. The cumulative trading volume for the January-October period was 596 million.

China introduced the green electricity certificate system as a pilot program in 2017. In December 2023, the NEA issued an initial batch of certificates.

The country has built the world's largest clean power system and carbon trading market, and its green industries continue to grow, according to the administration.

Civil Aviation

The civil aviation industry recorded a year-on-year increase of over 20 percent in both international passenger and cargo traffic in October.

The country's monthly air cargo and mail throughput surpassed 900,000 tons for the first time in history, data from the Civil Aviation Administration of China revealed on November 25.

In October, the total transport turnover of the industry reached 14.6 billion ton-km (the weight of the goods transported in tons multiplied by the distance traveled in km), up 10.8 percent year on year.

The volume of passenger transport hit 67.84 million, increasing 5.8 percent from the same period last year, and the volume of cargo and mail transport grew 13.4 percent to about 917,000 tons.

In the first 10 months, the industry's total transport turnover increased 10.3 percent year on year to 136.63 billion ton-km. Some 650 million passenger trips were made during the period, up 5.3 percent year on year, while cargo and mail transport volume rose 13.9 percent to 8.31 million tons.

Emerging Industries

China will start building national emerging industry development demonstration bases, with the goal of establishing about 100 industrial park demonstration bases and 1,000 enterprise-type demonstration bases by 2035, according to a circular released by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

Per the circular, the construction of demonstration bases will align with national development strategies for 2035 and the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) period, with a focus on key emerging sectors such as next-generation information technology, new energy, new materials, biology, high-end equipment, intelligent connected new-energy vehicles, low-altitude equipment and aerospace, and the green and environmental protection industries.

Industrial park demonstration bases will aim to promote the clustered, large-scale and high-end development of leading industries, strengthen the supply of key generic technologies, enhance the transformation and industrial application of sci-tech achievements, and explore management approaches suited to emerging industries.

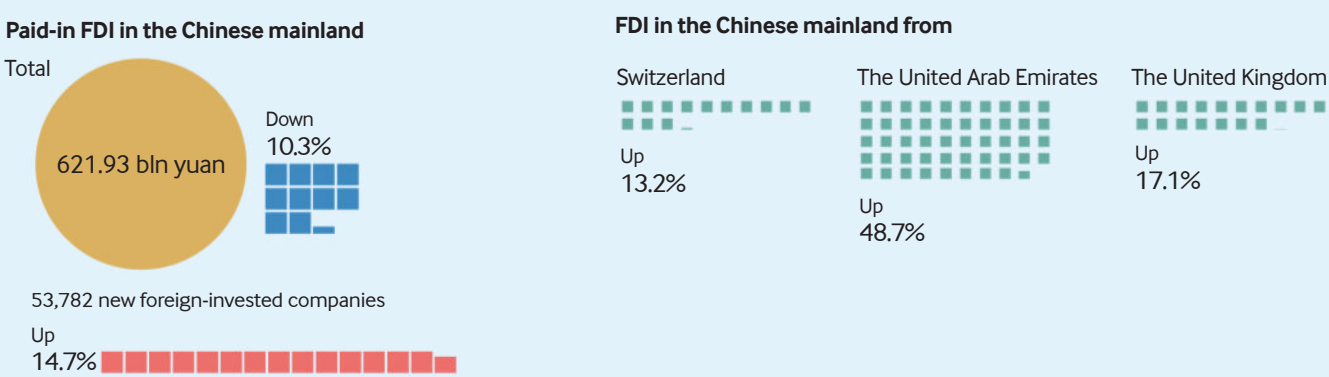
Demonstration enterprises will focus on strengthening product development, tackling key and core technologies and achieving breakthroughs in major original innovations. They will also work to foster new business forms and models, and promote innovation in application scenarios, according to the ministry.

Carbon Market Expansion

The national carbon market will cover all major industrial emitters by 2027 amid China's efforts to leverage market mechanisms for green and low-carbon transition, according

NUMBERS

Foreign direct investment (FDI) in January-November
(All growth rates are y.o.y., $1=7.07 yuan as of November 27)



to the Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE).

In October, the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee adopted the recommendations for formulating the country's 15th Five-Year Plan, laying out priorities including to expand the China Carbon Emission Trade Exchange to cover more sectors. The MEE has already launched preparatory work to include the chemical, petrochemical, civil aviation and paper manufacturing sectors.

For the steel, cement and aluminum smelting industries, which were added to the market in March, the MEE recently issued quota allocation plans for 2024 and 2025.

Key emitters in these newly added sectors must complete their quota compliance for 2024 by the end of this year. Quotas for 2025 will be pre-allocated in the first half of next year, with compliance due by the end of 2026.

Xia Yingxian, an official with the ministry, said the expansion would enforce emission reduction responsibilities and drive investment in low-carbon technologies.

The MEE plans to expand coverage gradually, adding new industries only when they meet strict data and emissions standards.

Installed Power Capacity

China's total installed power-generating capacity reached 3.75 billion kilowatts (kw) by the end of October, rising 17.3 percent year on year, official data showed on November 24.

Solar power capacity continued to drive the expansion, jumping 43.8 percent year on year to 1.14 billion kw. Wind power capacity also posted strong growth, increasing 21.4 percent to 590 million kw, according to the NEA.

By the end of September, China's installed renewable energy capacity had reached nearly 2.2 billion kw, accounting for approximately 59.1 percent of the country's total installed power capacity, earlier NEA data showed.

The country has built the world's largest renewable energy system. In the first four years of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period, China's energy consumption per unit of GDP dropped by a cumulative 11.6 percent. China has vowed to accelerate green transition across the board and build a Beautiful China in the coming five years.

China's electricity consumption, a key barometer of economic activity, rose 10.4 percent year on year in October to 857.2 billion kw-hours, according to NEA data released on November 21.

Power consumed by the overall industrial sector rose 6.4 percent year on year, while the tertiary sector saw a 17.1 percent increase. Residents' electricity consumption totaled 115.5 billion kw-hours, up 23.9 percent year on year.

From January to October, China's total power use climbed 5.1 percent to about 8.62 trillion kw-hours.

Rural Banks

Small and medium-sized banks in rural areas have seen steady expansion in scale, with their overall growth becoming more stable and sound, according to a report recently released by the China Banking Association.

As of the end of 2024, their total assets and liabilities had reached 57.91 trillion yuan ($8.2 trillion) and 53.69 trillion yuan ($7.6 trillion), up 6.06 percent and 6.02 percent year on year, respectively, the report shows.

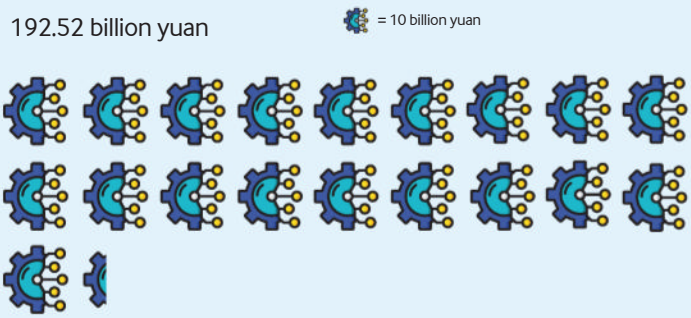
Outstanding loans at these banking institutions accounted for more than 55 percent of their total assets by the end of last year, with their credit business continuing to focus on the real economy, according to the report.

The report indicates that rural small and medium-sized banks are embracing multiple strategic opportunities, such as rural revitalization, coordinated regional development and upgrading consumer spending. They are also confronting practical challenges, including intensifying market competition and lagging digital transformation.

FDI in the Chinese mainland into

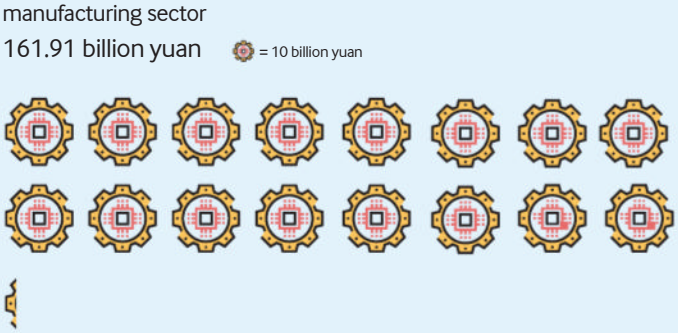
hi-tech sector

192.52 billion yuan



manufacturing sector

161.91 billion yuan



(Source: *Ministry of Commerce*)

XINHUA

GREECE

Actress Mary Mina, in the role of an ancient Greek High Priestess, lights the flame during the dress rehearsal of the Olympic flame lighting ceremony for the Milan-Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic Games in Ancient Olympia on November 24

MEXICO

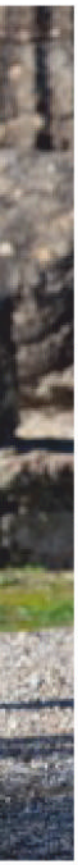
Children and adolescents perform in their native languages at Zocalo Square in Mexico City on November 22 to celebrate the "Yoltlajtoli: Living Voices" Indigenous Community Cultures Festival

XINHUA

XINHUA

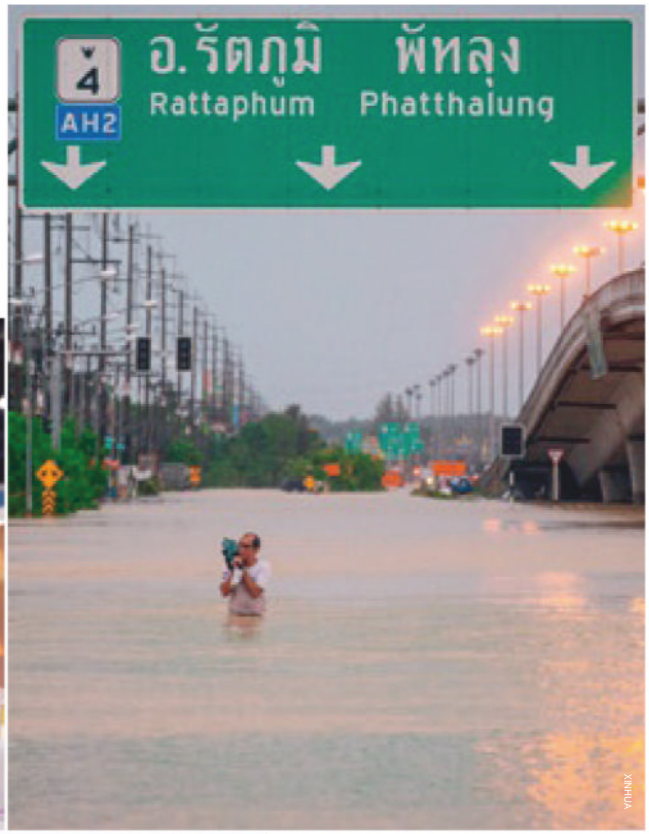
PAKISTAN

Rescuers work at the site of a chemical factory explosion in Faisalabad, Punjab Province, on November 21. Earlier that day, 12 people were killed and scores of others injured when a boiler exploded at the factory, located in a residential area



BAHRAIN

Visitors try perfumes at the Scent Arabia exhibition in Manama on November 25. The exhibition, which ran through November 29, featured over 100 brands from the Gulf countries and beyond



THAILAND

A man wades through floodwaters in a suburb of Hat Yai, Songkhla Province, on November 25. The monsoon-driven floods have impacted nine provinces in the southern region, affecting millions of people

INDONESIA

Ash spews from Mount Semeru in Lumajang Regency, East Java, on November 19. The eruption prompted the country's volcanology agency to raise the alert level to the maximum

DESIGNER BEHIND POPULAR MASCOTS

Liu Pingyun, a professor at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, was the creative force behind the hugely popular mascots for the 15th National Games, held in November in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

The mascots, named Xi Yangyang and Le Rongrong, are based on the Chinese white dolphin, an ecological icon of the GBA. The design team, led by Liu, introduced innovative pink and white color schemes.

"We observed that the skin of a Chinese white dolphin turns pink when it's physically active due to increased blood flow, so we incorporated this into our design," Liu explained.

Liu's team also designed the Games' emblem, featuring interlocked petals representing the three host regions. He was the lead executive designer of Bing Dwen Dwen, one of the two Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics mascots.

From Playgrounds to Python

Gmw.cn

November 24

Given the spread of AI in recent years, a parallel industry of after-school coding classes has sprung up to meet surging demand for tech-related skills. Yet parts of this new market have developed in curious—and troubling—ways. Some classes now pitch coding not as a tool for creativity or problem-solving, but as a supposed fast track to elite universities, boasting that certificates and medals in coding competitions offer decisive advantages in college applications. In doing so, they recast programming as a vehicle for peer pressure.

Children who are too young are pushed into coding drills they cannot digest and those in early primary grades are handed languages far beyond their grasp. The result is predictable: frustration, resistance and a quick extinguishing of curiosity.

The sector itself remains uneven, with copied curricula, inconsistent teaching quality and little oversight. Bringing order to the market will require clearer national standards on course design, teacher qualifications and marketing practices. For parents, a calmer perspective may help: Coding is a useful skill, but hardly a golden pass to success.

Sports Mean Business

Oriental Outlook

November 13

China's tourism scene is undergoing a subtle yet profound transformation. Travelers are moving beyond passive spectating to seeking experiences that combine sports, culture and natural sightseeing. Once a niche segment, sports tourism is now entering the mainstream. According to a 2023-24 report by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the global sports tourism market has been growing at roughly 15 percent annually, while China's domestic sector is expanding at 30-40 percent per year.

"This is the first time China has contextualized the two battlefields within a single exhibition space, underscoring the united anti-fascist spirit of people across the world."

Zhao Jiaojian, planner of an exhibition honoring shared Chinese and Spanish anti-fascist fight in Beijing, commenting on this ongoing event

"The modern society that we are living in did not emerge out of nowhere. Instead, it grew from the deep soil of our traditional culture."

Jin Minqing, head of the Institute of Contemporary China Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, during the Global South Modernization Forum in Beijing on November 21

The trend has prompted many traditional scenic areas to rethink their operations. Wugong Mountain in Jiangxi Province, for instance, has reinvented itself as a hub for outdoor sports, offering hiking trails, highland football fields, rafting courses and a range of camping facilities. In many regions, sports tourism is also driving rural revitalization. In Shiwo, a village in Sichuan Province that houses a popular ice and snow scenic area, more than 150 of its 500 residents have become certified mountain guides. During the climbing season, guides can earn up to 8,000 yuan ($1,100) per month, boosting the village's average annual income by roughly 30 percent.

The boom is even feeding into manufacturing. One classic example is Zhangjiakou, co-host of the 2022 Winter Olympics, which has developed into a hub for both skiing destinations and snow sports equipment manufacturing, producing everything from cable car systems to carbon fiber skis.

Yet this rapid expansion is exposing a serious talent gap. With only a handful of university programs dedicated to sports tourism, the industry struggles with a dire shortage of trained managers, venue operators and other specialized professionals. As the sector matures, closing this skills gap will be critical—not only to keep pace with rising demand but also to ensure that China's sports tourism boom remains sustainable.

Work Without Barriers

Ce.cn

November 26

In Chengdu, many passengers have recently noticed a rising number of ride-hailing drivers with hearing impairments. This is part of a wider shift, where more and more people with disabilities are increasingly integrated into the country's workforce. According to the China Disabled Persons' Federation, by the end of 2024, 9.14 million work-eligible people with disabilities were employed nationwide, an increase of 512,000 from the previous year. The figures highlight not only the ability of people with disabilities to realize their potential through work, but also society's expanding support for inclusive employment.

In recent years, local governments across China have introduced dedicated programs to help disabled residents find work, offering full-chain support ranging from skills training to professional certification. A national three-year action plan for 2025-27, issued earlier this year, requires governments at all levels to prioritize employment for people with disabilities.

The engagement of companies is also crucial. Employers are encouraged to recognize employees with disabilities as equal participants in the workforce, ensure their rights and design roles suited to their abilities.

YOUNGEST CAS MEMBER

With the announcement of the 2025 election results on November 21, **Liu Ruochuan**, 44, became the first Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) member born in the 1980s.

CAS membership is China's highest academic accolade in science and technology. Liu, a professor at Peking University, earned the distinction for his groundbreaking work in arithmetic geometry and algebraic number theory. His research in number theory, a core branch of fundamental mathematics, provides crucial theoretical support for cryptography and AI.

A gold medalist at the 40th International Mathematical Olympiad in 1999, Liu obtained his bachelor's and master's degrees from Peking University and his Ph.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2008. He returned to teach at Peking University in 2012 after postdoctoral research in France.

"Based on China's own development needs, emphasizing balanced import-export development aims to drive domestic consumption upgrading and industrial transformation through imports and share development opportunities with trade partners."

Chen Hongna, an associate researcher at the Development Research Center of the State Council, in a recent interview with Xinhua News Agency

"This shattered the conventional understanding that macromolecules cannot penetrate the skin barrier."

Shen Youqing, a professor at the College of Chemical and Biological Engineering at Zhejiang University, speaking about a new technology developed by his team that can achieve non-invasive delivery of insulin for diabetes patients through skin

COVER STORY

A NEW URBAN LIFE

China promotes urban renewal for better quality of life By Li Xiaoyang

COURTESY PHOTO

A view of JM Café, designed by Japanese architect Shuhei Aoyama, in the renovated Baitasi Neighborhood in Beijing

The long-standing use of portable toilet cubicles by residents of Shanghai's narrow, labyrinthine alleys came to an end in September after the city largely finished building public toilets to make up their lack of sanitation facilities. The project, targeting 14,082 households, started last year.

In early November, the city advanced its push to become smarter. It is expanding public digital infrastructure to facilitate people's lives, with services ranging from providing reliable Internet access outdoors to installing intelligent kiosks to assist elderly individuals who become disoriented or lose their way.

Shanghai's endeavors are part of the national drive of urban renewal. Data from the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development this year showed that during the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period, China commenced renovation of over 240,000 old residential communities, benefiting 110 million people in 40 million households.

Old urban residential areas have been enhanced through improving infrastructure like elevators and street lights, and installing smart services. According to the ministry, the renovated communities across China have installed 129,000 new elevators, added over 3.4 million parking lots and built 64,000 facilities for elderly and child care.

The recommendations for formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30), adopted at the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee from October 20 to 23, outline key development priorities for the country during this period—including advancing urban renewal and building innovative, livable and smart modern cities.

According to Yun Shuang, Deputy Director of Tsinghua Tongheng Urban Planning and Design Institute, a company affiliated with Tsinghua University, China is at a point where enhancing the urban living environment is essential. In the new phase, urban renewal is key to high-quality urban development.

"The recommendations prioritize empowering cities with innovative approaches, suggesting that innovative transformation is urgent for current urban development in China," Yun told *Beijing Review*. ►►

Making cities smarter

As technological and economic growth drive smarter urban development, Chinese cities are moving up in the rankings of the International Institute for Management Development's Smart City Index, the latest of which was released in April. Beijing ranked 14th in this year's index and Shanghai climbed four places to the 15th position.

According to the report accompanying the index, Chongqing and Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang Province, have both made notable smart city progress over the past three years.

In Shanghai, tech companies are empowering the city's smart transformation. Based in the city, Keenon Robotics, a leading embodied service robot company with products available in over 60 countries and regions, has introduced diverse products ranging from humanoid robots to delivery robots. According to the company, its humanoid embodied service robot XMAN-R1 began use at the Shangri-La hotel at Hongqiao Airport in Shanghai in October.

The robots assist human staff with multiple tasks, including guest reception, room cleaning, food and item delivery and luggage handling. XMAN-R1 is also able to interact with guests through voice and human-like gestures, greeting them and answering inquiries.

In Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, smart services have become part of daily life. Drones can deliver food within 10 minutes of ordering, and robots deliver meals directly to rooms at hotels. There are also self-driving buses running on planned routes.

Today, many cities in China have established digital urban management platforms. Chongqing's digital urban operations and governance center acts as the city's "super brain," enabling comprehensive monitoring, in-depth analysis and precise management across multiple sectors—including water, electricity, and gas supply systems; telecommunications; and critical infrastructure such as bridges, tunnels and pipelines.

More livable

Megacities like Shanghai and Beijing have been improving their living environments through urban renewal, addressing issues resulting from dense populations, old buildings and narrow alleys.

In the early 1990s, per-capita living space averaged just 6.6 square meters in Shanghai due to inadequate urban planning and population growth. Since traditional architectural designs did not include private sanitation facilities, all residents of an alley had to rely on one public restroom.

In one alley in Jing'an District, just four public restrooms were shared by over 100 residents. Starting in 2005, the district started a 20-year renovation project for this large residential area, including demolition and rebuilding of old buildings and improvement of facilities. Unused space within the neighborhood has been used to expand the number of restrooms to nearly 40.

After the "toilet revolution" in Shanghai, households in renovated communities now enjoy private bathrooms, or see improved outdoor restrooms. Facilities including canteens, nursing homes and gyms have also been opened.

According to the municipal authorities, Shanghai renovated 136,000 square meters of old residential buildings, benefiting 4,697 households in 2024.

Renovation for a new life

Walking into the historical Baitasi (White Stupa Temple) Neighborhood in Xicheng District in downtown Beijing, one could be easily attracted to the JM Café there. With its grey brick walls, the café blends perfectly into the surrounding *hutong* alleys and courtyard houses of the area. *Hutong*s, meaning narrow streets or lanes, are unique to northern China.

Located in Dongxicha Hutong in the neighborhood, the store was renovated and opened earlier this year. Inside, a well-positioned window offers the perfect view of the iconic white pagoda in the temple, a Buddhist structure designed by a Nepalese architect and built in the early Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368).

"We respect the invisible power and trace of time contained in historical sites, and we think about how to fit the modern lifestyle to shape a new spatial form," Japanese architect Shuhei Aoyama, who designed the café, told *Beijing Review*. By merging traditional elements and modern aesthetics, Aoyama's team has created a space allowing people to capture the delicate balance between the new and the old, the dynamic and the stillness. He expects that the building will preserve the history of the area, and become a part of Beijing by bringing it new landscape and vitality.

Aoyama said he feels that *hutong*s are unique, one-of-a-kind urban spaces in Beijing. Having lived in the *hutong*s himself, he developed a deep appreciation for the life in the community. "I feel that in the *hutong*s, buildings are in constant dialogue with their environment," he said. Therefore, he has preserved structure of the original buildings in his design.

"During the implementation, the biggest challenge of renewal lies in coordination with neighbors. We have maintained space for the residents so that visitors would not bother their life," he said.

In 2014, Aoyama co-founded an architectural studio at a Beijing startup hub. After that, he shifted his focus on revitalizing old neighborhoods and historical districts.

By employing new materials and techniques, Aoyama's team has joined the local endeavors addressing common issues in *hutong* living: cramped spaces, poor insulation, inadequate bathrooms, and limited ventilation and daylight. The team has launched renovation projects in Nanluogu Xiang alley and designed cafés across different cities.

"After urban renewal projects are initiated, the participation of

XINHUA

A staff member monitors urban management at a smart city center in Tianjin Municipality on September 27, 2024

brands and businesses is even more important than the design for sustainable and vital growth of the neighborhood," Aoyama said.

In recent years, Baitasi Neighborhood has gone viral on social media platforms, turning into a landmark for people following the trend of city walking. The grocery shops, barbershops and tailor shops there are still kept open for use by local residents.

The new look is the result of years of renovation. Before the project began in 2015, private indoor space was so limited that vibrant daily life spilled out into the *hutong*s. Passersby could see residents cooking, playing mahjong, cycling through or chatting outside. A tangle of electrical wires overhead and household belongings spilling into the alleys added to the clutter, making the narrow lanes feel even tighter.

In 2015, Baitasi Neighborhood began embracing urban renewal. The project tackled old-city renewal challenges by introducing innovative policies for residents to relocate voluntarily with compensation or sign lease agreements with businesses moving into the neighborhood.

The renewal in the neighborhood has improved housing conditions for 1,230 households, unleashed 37,000 square meters of space and renovated facades of buildings. It has also completed underground relocation of power lines, eliminating the once densely packed wires above the roof, according to the Beijing Municipal Government.

The renovation of abandoned industrial sites also breathes new life into wasteland. In west Beijing, visitors enjoy the grand views of steel furnaces at Shougang Park, which has been transformed from a steel mill into a multipurpose leisure and events destination. Shougang Group, a leading steelmaker in China, founded in 1919, once posted an annual output record of 10 million tons.

As part of Beijing's pursuit of industrial upgrading and green development, Shougang Group relocated its production base and built eco-friendly iron and steel production lines.

While the steelmaking operations in Beijing were halted in 2010, the industrial site has been revived through renovation. Deserted workshops, plants and furnaces were repurposed into a zone where technology firms thrive alongside destinations for entertainment, expos and athletic competitions.

Last year, the Shougang Park Blast Furnace No.1 SoReal Science Fiction Paradise opened to the public. At the sci-fi park visitors can try their hands at virtual reality games like skydiving or flying planes. A café built from a deserted furnace has become a popular destination.

Up and up

According to the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, China will continue to promote urban upgrading during the 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-30).

Efforts will continue to improve living environments, ensure rental housing access, advance urban renewal and improve urban governance, the ministry said.

Yun suggested cities involve spatial planning from the initial stage of projects to enhance feasibility. Urban renewal is shifting from demolition to enhancement based on original structures and the new round of transformation should focus on improving weak points, and maintain historical and cultural identities of the cities, Yun said.

"The local governments need to play their roles in boosting demand, encourage the participation of private investment to vitalize the market and explore distinctive, innovation-driven city development approaches," Yun said. **BR**

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COVER STORY

RENEWED ROOTS

The Chinese wisdom of harmony behind Guangzhou's urban renewal

By Tao Zihui

This summer, the central dance floor of New York's Lincoln Center came alive as thousands of audience members moved to the rhythm of *Da Zhan Hong Tu* (Blueprint Supreme). The song's performer, young rapper Chen Xukai, also known by his stage names Lan Lao and SKAI ISYOURGOD, is from China's Guangdong Province, and had more than 3 million listeners this July on Spotify, the global streaming giant.

The scenes depicted in the lyrics—"congee stalls by the Dongjiang River," "drinking herbal tea"—are vivid snapshots of life in Guangzhou's urban villages, known as *chengzhongcun* in Chinese.

The dense, often informal settlements within China's rapidly developing metropolitan areas generate endless discussions. Rather than disappearing through urbanization, some of these communities in Guangzhou expanded alongside the city's growth.

According to Guangzhou's Urban Village Redevelopment Plan (2021-35), the city now contains 272 such settlements across all 11 districts. They are not merely historical relics of urban development but crucial testing grounds for exploring modern governance in a megacity.

The transformation

At six in the evening, the aroma of barbecue wafted through the lanes of Lirendong Village in Panyu District, Guangzhou. He Jiamin, a 27-year-old e-commerce operator just off work, descended the stairs carrying three empty cardboard delivery boxes for recycling. Granny Chen, her hair streaked with grey, greeted him with a smile as she accepted them with a "thank you" in Cantonese.

"Three years ago, when I arrived in Guangzhou with my luggage, I thought an urban village was just a temporary stopgap," He reflected, sitting on a bench in the new residential complex built for the original residents through an urban renewal project, with newly delivered modern apartment buildings behind him and a brightly lit digital economy industrial park in the distance. The rent for his single room hasn't increased much, but the complex now comes with elevators, charging stations and 24-hour security. "Now that the street stalls downstairs are regulated, I don't have to worry about food safety any more and my landlady still invites me to her home for sweet soup."

Lirendong Village, located in the core area of Guangzhou's southern central business district, was once renowned as China's No.1 Taobao Village due to its thriving e-commerce industry. However, as the city's development ambitions grew, its outdated spatial layout and industrial infrastructure could no longer meet the demands of high-quality development.

In 2019, the Guangzhou Municipal Government, partnering with state-owned developer Yuexiu Property, initiated a regeneration project with a total investment exceeding 50 billion yuan ($7 billion), making it the largest urban village renovation project in the city.

This October, as a typical example of urban village regeneration in Chinese megacities, the Lirendong project reached a major milestone—1,677 households formally moved into the first batch of new housing, leaving behind the cramped handshake buildings (so named because they are so close neighbors could literally shake hands from adjacent windows) and poorly lit alleyways.

The regeneration

"I had waited 15 years to finally take my granddaughter for walks in my new neighborhood," Xian Yan (pseudonym) told *Guangzhou Daily*, standing on the balcony of her new apartment, capturing the moment the last two village houses in Xiancun Village of Guangzhou were demolished.

As the last remaining urban village in the prestigious Zhujiang New Town area, Xiancun Village was once considered the toughest nut to crack in China's urban regeneration efforts: 1,421 households, 1,950 structures, entangled with complex issues like property disputes and illegal construction.

A turning point came in May 2024 with the implementation of the regulations on the renovation of urban villages in Guangzhou. As the first specialized local regulation of its kind in China, it provided the key to breaking the deadlock in Xiancun Village through lawful procedures.

While located close to her former handshake building, Xiancun's new home is a world apart, featuring natural gas supply, smart home systems and a soon-to-be-completed kindergarten downstairs.

The preservation

If large-scale, wholesale redevelopment addresses the hardware issues of urban villages, then meticulously crafted micro-regeneration protects the city's software—its memory. Not far from Xiancun Village, in Liwan District's Yongqing Fang, an experiment in urban renewal focused on cultural preservation is quietly underway.

Underfoot are clean, granite block pavements, surrounded by bustling tourists and flanked by intangible cultural heritage workshops and trendy boutiques; above, laundry aired from the windows of original residents. This unique coexistence of tradition and modernity is made possible by Guangzhou's micro-regeneration model.

The regeneration project meticulously preserved all 79 architectural heritage sites and six intangible cultural heritage items within the original street network. Through this careful approach, the traditional streetscape of 1.2 km of Qilou—a distinctive

CNSPHOTO

International Internet celebrity Khaby Lame visits Yongqing Fang, Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, on September 17

arcaded building style characteristic of Guangdong—was completely restored. This allowed the neighborhood to retain its authentic historical flavor while achieving contemporary revitalization.

Empowered by this subtle urban renewal and cultural infusion, Yongqing Fang received over 20 million visitors last year. The number of businesses increased from 36 in 2016 to more than 130, with 2024 street revenue exceeding 200 million yuan ($28 million), a year-on-year increase of over 30 percent. These figures demonstrate that cultural preservation and commercial development can be mutually reinforcing.

"A city should not merely be an object of public view, but a living space for the individuals who inhabit it," Zhou Zhanfeng, Director of the European Market Division of the Inbound Department at China International Travel Service, told *Beijing Review*.

Every year, newly graduated young people, carrying backpacks and rolling suitcases, enter these urban villages, their hearts a mix of anxiety and hope. Here, they find affordable housing and begin their stories of integrating into the city.

Nightlife in the urban villages begins with dinner. Barbecue stalls from all over China gather near subway entrances. These vendors used to play a familiar cat-and-mouse game with city management authorities, to dodge regulation. Now, management is more standardized, with designated streets for night vending, while vendors are required to pay monthly stall fees and display health certificates and food safety licenses prominently.

After dinner, young people are often seen walking their dogs, or taking their cats to fetch delivery packages. This is also the time they might run into their landladies dancing in the square. If they see their own landlord, they'll often exchange a polite greeting.

These daily rhythms of urban village life directly inspire Lan Lao's music. He blends Memphis hip-hop with Cantonese cultural sensibilities, creating a "Lan-style Memphis" sound that bridges local dialect and modern rap. His self-deprecating lyrics—A Mercedes-Benz building opposite, I park my Yadea e-scooter to the side—capture the inclusive spirit of Guangzhou's urban renewal.

"Guangzhou's regeneration has not dampened the vibrant energy of its urban villages; instead, it has elevated this coexistence between refinement and vulgarity into a prominent feature. This is precisely its core appeal to the world," remarked Lin Zheng, an associate professor of Chinese at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, in a post on Douyin and Its Friends—a popular cultural channel on the Douyin (TikTok) platform.

This vision of vibrant street life coexisting with modern convenience is unfolding across Guangzhou's 272 urban villages. Once synonymous with densely packed handshake buildings and weak infrastructure, these villages have also been crucial springboards for millions of newcomers. The transnational e-commerce giant Shein started here, the music of one of China's most popular rock bands Wutiaoren was born here, and countless young people launched their dreams from these streets.

According to the 2025 Government Work Report, China is continuously advancing urban renewal including the renovation of old residential communities. In 2024, urban village regeneration expanded to over 300 cities, with approximately 60,000 urban renewal projects implemented and completed investment reaching about 2.9 trillion yuan ($0.4 trillion). Within this vast context, Guangzhou's exploration is particularly valuable.

"We started with thorough communication with villagers from the design phase, letting them clearly see the blueprint for their future," Ding Li, Chief Economist at the Guangzhou Municipal Housing and Urban-Rural Development Bureau, said. This people-oriented philosophy ensures that urban renewal is not merely a physical transformation but also a reshaping of social relations.

Today, the resettlement apartments of Xiancun Village form a seamless skyline with the skyscrapers of Zhujiang New Town, while the grey bricks and black tiles of Yongqing Fang echo the sci-tech innovation towers nearby. In these spaces where old and new intertwine, different lifestyles are fully respected, and tradition and modernity achieve harmonious coexistence. **BR**

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The Reason for China's Rage

By Liang Xiao

It has been nearly a month since Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi claimed in the Diet on November 7 that the Chinese mainland's possible "use of force on Taiwan" could create a "survival-threatening situation" for Japan and suggested the possibility of armed intervention in the Taiwan Straits, yet the ensuing diplomatic dispute between China and Japan continues to escalate.

China's outrage is palpable, forming into what may be one of its sternest diplomatic stances in nearly three decades. On November 21, Ambassador Fu Cong, Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations (UN), sent a letter to UN Secretary General António Guterres, which is to be circulated to all UN member states as an official document of the General Assembly. In his letter, Ambassador Fu pointed out that Takaichi's remarks constitute two historical "firsts" since Japan's defeat in 1945: the first official expression of ambition to intervene militarily in the Taiwan question, and the first threat of force against China. He stated: "If Japan dares to attempt an armed intervention in the cross-Strait situation, it would be an act of aggression. China will resolutely exercise its right of self-defense under the UN Charter and international law and firmly defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity."

For most people worldwide with a basic understanding of international relations, it is understood that the Taiwan question lies at the very core of China's interests. Recognition of the one-China principle—namely, that the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government of China and that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China—is the prerequisite for other countries to establish diplomatic relations with China. While unfriendly countries do occasionally attempt to challenge it on the Taiwan question, prompting China to resolutely defend its sovereignty with concrete actions, Beijing's reaction is rarely this intense.

This provocation from Japan is a different matter entirely. Japan repeatedly attempted to invade the island of Taiwan in modern history. Finally, in 1895, after defeating the government of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) in the First Sino-Japanese War, Japan forcibly seized Taiwan under the Treaty of Shimonoseki and subjected it to colonial rule for nearly 50 years. It was not until 1945, following its defeat in World War II (WWII), that Japan was compelled to implement the terms of the Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Proclamation, formally restoring Taiwan and the Penghu Islands to China. Against this historical backdrop, it is inevitable that Japan's interference in China's internal affairs regarding the Taiwan question would be met with a fierce response from China.

What compels China to be even more vigilant is Japan's claim that a so-called "crisis" in the Taiwan Straits would trigger a "survival-threatening situation." Historically, hyping up external threats and manufacturing a sense of crisis were standard tactics employed by Japanese militarism. Time and again, Japan used the pretext of exaggerating external threats and fabricating "survival crises" to justify and mobilize for its wars of aggression and acts that disrupted regional peace. In 1931, using the so-called "survival-threatening situation" as a pretext, Japan staged the September 18 Incident and invaded northeast China; later, it proclaimed that the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," which aimed to cloak Japan's imperialism in layer of legitimacy, was a "battle for Japan's survival," spreading the flames of aggression throughout Asia; it even linked the attack on Pearl Harbor to "Japan's survival," ultimately launching the Pacific War against the U. S.

If China condones Japan's actions, it may give a misguided perception to right-wing forces attempting to whitewash Japan's history of aggression and resurrect militarism, leading them to believe they have an opportunity to disrupt the global landscape once again. As a representative figure of these right-wing forces, since assuming the office of prime minister, Takaichi has adopted an unprecedentedly radical stance. She has repeatedly expressed intentions to significantly increase the defense budget, thoroughly overhaul arms export policies and build a comprehensive offensive and defensive system, all in a bid to transform Japan into a military power with independent deterrent capabilities. This constitutes not only a security threat to neighboring countries but also a blatant subversion of the contemporary international order. As a defeated nation in WWII, Japan was required to undergo "complete disarmament" and prohibited from maintaining "industries which would enable her to re-arm for war." Furthermore, in its own "Pacifist Constitution," Japan pledged to "forever renounce war and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes."

Japan appears to be aiming to destabilize

ZHAO WEI & AI

the Asia-Pacific region by provoking China, intending to bind the U.S. to the "war chariot" of the Japan-U.S. alliance in exchange for American support in breaking the shackles of its Pacifist Constitution. However, from the U.S. perspective, the calculation is different. While Washington may be willing to embolden Japan to harass China on specific issues, it by no means wishes for Takaichi to stir up a major crisis. This is particularly true as the U.S. is currently attempting to thaw relations with Beijing and has no desire to be placed in an even more precarious position. Furthermore, while Takaichi's remarks ostensibly serve as a provocation against China, they are, in reality, a direct challenge to the international order established since WWII. This underlying nature of her actions destines her to find little support within the international community.

On this point, the U.S. and China appear to have reached a certain common consensus. On the evening of November 24, U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping talked over the phone. President Xi underscored that Taiwan's return to China is an integral part of the post-war international order. China and the U.S. fought shoulder to shoulder against fascism and militarism. Given what is going on, it is even more important for the two countries to jointly safeguard the victory of WWII. President Trump said China was a big part of the victory of WWII and the U.S. understands how important the Taiwan question is to China.

Japan's hope for U.S. intervention appears to be a path that leads nowhere. Takaichi must offer a profound apology for her remarks and completely abandon the delusion of resurrecting militarism. For China, the principle that must be upheld is clear: The Taiwan question is purely an internal affair of China. The manner in which the Taiwan question is resolved and the complete reunification of China is realized is a matter entirely for the Chinese people. No external forces have the right to interfere. And Japan, bearing historical guilt for its crimes against the Chinese people, is in no position whatsoever to cross this red line. **BR**

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China-EU Relations at 50

As China and the EU mark the 50th anniversary of their diplomatic relations this year, *Beijing Review* reporter Li Wenhan spoke with **George N. Tzogopoulos**, Senior Research Fellow at the Centre international de formation européenne. In the interview, Tzogopoulos shared his insights on the evolving China-EU relations, the impact of China-U.S. interactions on Europe and the prospects for cooperation in areas such as green transition and global governance. Edited excerpts of their conversation follow:

***Beijing Review*: As 2025 is the 50th anniversary of China-EU diplomatic relations, how would you evaluate the current state of bilateral economic ties?**

George Tzogopoulos: This is a very important year for China and the EU. Looking back, the two sides have achieved a great deal. Trade and investment are characteristic examples of win-win cooperation. If we look at how trade numbers have evolved—how they looked in the past and how they look today—the progress clearly shows that both sides share the will to move forward economically. (Bilateral trade grew from $2.4 billion to $780 billion over the past five decades—*Ed.*)

For many years, Chinese companies have been investing in Europe, and they remain prepared to do so. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) facilitates this cooperation. Some EU member states participate in the BRI while others do not, but even those outside the initiative are influenced, directly or indirectly, by the increased connectivity it promotes. I use the term "organic interconnectivity" to describe this, because Chinese investments—whether under the BRI or not—have contributed to deeper economic ties.

Europe, for its part, is also implementing its Global Gateway mechanism to play a global role. Despite differences, the two sides can hopefully find a way forward and even cooperate in other regions such as Africa or Latin America. Investments do not only need to take place in Europe or China; they can help the developing world meet its challenges.

A good example is the China-Europe freight train network. The number of routes has grown significantly, and so has the volume of transported goods. (China-Europe freight trains have completed nearly 120,000 trips as of November 19—*Ed.*) Despite regional instability in today's world, trade volumes remain stable—again demonstrating the willingness on both sides to work together. From the European perspective, maintaining this trade volume is important. At the same time, Europe is working with China to address the trade deficit, and European companies hope for more reciprocity in the Chinese market.

Some European industries feel challenged by the rise of Chinese technological companies, which creates frictions. But the most important point is that dialogue continues. The 25th EU-China Summit took place in Beijing in July. There are ongoing dialogues on climate change, digital issues, as well as a new format of discussions on export controls and technology.

With new-energy vehicles (NEVs), China has created its own miracle. The country has become a global leader in producing electric vehicles (EVs), and this naturally impacts the European market—often seen as a competitive challenge for local industries. But European policymakers must factor in China's rapid progress, because without China's expertise and experience in EV manufacturing, it will be difficult for Europe to achieve its own climate and energy goals. The cooperation examples you mentioned (Volkswagen and Chinese NEV maker XPeng's announcement in August to co-develop software) highlight the determination of both sides to find a way forward. It is not always easy, but the will exists.

Overall, after passing through phases of disagreements and agreements in recent years, China-EU relations are currently in a relatively stable phase. The two sides understand each other's positions. Not all disagreements can be solved immediately, but both sides need each other, and this is crucial for building a more multilateral world.

Climate cooperation has been a priority for both sides, especially following the recent United Nations (UN) Climate Change Conference (COP30) in Brazil. What potential do you see for China-EU cooperation on green transition, climate governance and global governance more broadly?

There is only one planet and it belongs to all citizens of the world. Climate change is a transnational challenge that cannot be solved by any single actor; it requires cooperation. Sino-European cooperation can help both sides take meaningful measures to address climate change. EVs produced in China, for instance, are part of this broader context.

China is also a leader in energy transition. This makes China relevant not only to Europe but to the world. On this basis, I believe both sides are willing to discuss solutions. After the EU-China Summit, a joint statement on climate change was issued, showing the shared interest in cooperating. A climate change dialogue mechanism also exists. The more the two sides talk, the easier it will be for them to reach useful conclusions.

Regarding global governance, China's proposals in this field, like the Global Governance Initiative, are important, especially as China's influence grows and its voice becomes more prominent in the international system. The key question is whether the new world order will remain anchored in the UN. Discussions about UN Security Council reform have been ongoing for years, though reforms remain difficult to implement.

The UN is not losing its popularity. What is happening is that some of the permanent members of the security council do not necessarily value the role of the UN in the world, and they follow the policy of unilateralism. If we look at how the EU is acting in the international system, and it opts for multilateralism.

Here I see potential for China-EU collaboration, as both believe in the importance of the UN. The UN continues to play an important role, contributing to poverty eradication, addressing climate issues and maintaining elements of collective security.

With the UN's 80th anniversary this year, it is worth reflecting on its role since World War II (WWII). There has been no global conflict on the scale of WWII since its founding.

Europe, as a strong supporter of multilateralism, continues to promote stability. And this is where China and the EU share interests: Both value calmness and stability in the international system and both want a functioning multilateral framework.

How do China and Europe navigate global tensions and public perceptions—on issues ranging from U.S. tariffs to people-to-people exchange?

It is difficult to fully assess President Donald Trump's tariff policies because the situation is evolving, and we need more time before drawing safe conclusions. In the early months of the year, European imports from China increased due to these tariffs. The EU is not interested in entering a trade war with the U.S. Much depends on the understandings recently reaffirmed between President Xi Jinping and President Trump. If this exchange holds, it will be good news not only for China and the U.S., but also for the EU.

The fact that differences exist does not mean that the two sides cannot work together. Collaboration is essential for the interests of both sides, and is essential for maintaining stability in the international system

China-EU relations follow their own trajectory. They are not determined by U.S. policies. China and the EU have overlapping interests irrespective of Washington's decisions, and they must navigate based on their own priorities. China is a major actor. Its economy is the world's second largest, and Europe cannot ignore that. So while disagreements exist, Europe seeks ways forward that serve all sides' interests.

This is where the concept of strategic autonomy comes in: Europe wants to remain strong and resilient, able to respond to international challenges without being overly influenced by U.S.-China tensions. But achieving strategic autonomy takes time. We see progress, but the real assessment must come in the medium term.

Regarding Asia-Pacific issues, it's important to look at China's role in contributing to peace during WWII. Because without the crucial sacrifices of China and of the Chinese people, perhaps the duration of WWII might have been prolonged, with serious consequences for the international system. And not much is known about this in the West. So it's quite important to look at the history of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and then the importance of the Chinese resistance in contributing to peace.

European audiences generally lack detailed knowledge about Asian affairs, and more academic exchanges—conferences, meetings of historians and university collaborations—can help European audiences better understand this part of history.

People-to-people exchanges are crucial. China's visa-free policy for most EU member states is facilitating travel and research. Tourist numbers are rising, flights are increasing and the renewal of the visa-free policy for 2026 is good news. More exchanges among students, scholars and ordinary tourists can enhance mutual understanding.

This relationship is very important. The fact that differences exist does not mean that the two sides cannot work together. Collaboration is essential for the interests of both sides, and is essential for maintaining stability in the international system. I remain hopeful that the two sides will intensify contacts, and that more agreements will be reached at the highest political level.

Now, as far as ordinary citizens are concerned, I think that traveling from the one side to the other can contribute to a better understanding, and the better understanding can be the basis for friendlier ties between China and Europe. **BR**

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The Business of Peace

By Paweł Wargan

Donald Trump has dubbed himself "the peace president." He promises to secure this title with the crowning achievement of his second term: an end to the nearly decade-long proxy war in Ukraine.

The contours of this ambition were revealed in a 28-point "peace plan," which was leaked to the press in late November. The document was presented to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky as an ultimatum: accept immediate territorial concessions, a cap on Ukraine's armed forces, and a permanent ban on NATO accession—or risk losing U.S. military aid.

Zelensky gambled on a third path. Days after Trump's plan emerged, Europe presented a counterproposal. The document—reportedly drafted in Berlin, Paris and London—was less measured than the version drawn up in Washington. Where the U.S. plan offers vague "security guarantees," the European alternative suggests a mutual defense pact modeled on NATO's Article 5. It proposes freezing the conflict rather than making territorial concessions. And it leaves open the prospect of Ukraine's NATO membership.

The European counterproposal appears designed to be rejected by Russia—part of a strategy to frame Moscow as hostile to diplomacy. "Putin must realize that he has no chance of winning this war at the expense of the European order of freedom and peace," German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said, while promising further cuts to the German welfare state to fund its rearmament, a tendency we are witnessing across the continent.

The division on the continent

With Europe resolutely against peace—even as Ukraine's defensive lines collapse—it is difficult to see how these provisions may ultimately be adopted. Moscow itself has maintained a cool distance from the discussions. While acknowledging the deal as a "substantive" step toward further dialogue, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said it was "impossible to comment" on the proposal amid the "information frenzy" surrounding it.

What is clear is that there is a cold, transactional logic to the 28-point "peace plan,"—both within Europe and beyond it. Europe's apparent impotence is not an aberration from the historic norm, but a reflection of the depth of its subordination to U.S. interests. NATO, from the start, served to transform Western Europe into a staging ground for confrontation with the Eastern Bloc.

That agenda only accelerated after the Soviet Union's collapse. "Europeans have proven incapable, left to themselves, of settling their differences peacefully," then Senator Joe Biden said in the opening remarks of a 1997 U.S. Senate debate on NATO enlargement. "The U.S. it seems to me must continue to lead the new security architecture for that continent."

For the U.S., NATO expansion promised to deepen and expand U.S. influence across Eurasia, a vast region that U.S. strategist Zbigniew Brzezinski called "the grand chessboard." With the Soviet Union gone, the U.S. could now gain "unlimited access to this hitherto closed area," Brzezinski wrote, securing Russia's vast mineral wealth and a strategic bridgehead to East Asia.

But however subordinated NATO members had become to U.S. foreign policy interests, they nonetheless presented a challenge for U.S. policymakers. Throughout the Cold War, U.S. officials complained not only about Western Europe's insufficient spending on war, but also about its relations with the countries of the Third World and occasional overtures to the Eastern Bloc. The U.S., embroiled in wars and regime change efforts around the Global South, was shouldering a major part of the burden of maintaining the imperialist system. "The Europeans get free defense and give nothing for it," Henry Kissinger said in 1974.

Trump appears to have succeeded where his predecessors failed. Europe is not only rearming. It has also foreclosed the possibility of rapprochement with Moscow, securing its permanent dependence on the U.S. Whether or not peace in Ukraine can be secured, European rearmament means that the U.S. can pivot East, safe in the knowledge that Europe will continue to shoulder regional confrontations on its own.

Core of U.S. 'peace deals'

This feature of Trump's diplomatic manoeuvres is unique to Europe given the continent's security architecture. But the Ukraine peace deal is also deeply revealing of Washington's broader global strategy. In fact, the White House has now brokered a number of so-called "peace deals," with others in motion. From Palestine to Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to Ukraine, these processes reveal a clear pattern: one that inflames conflicts to end them, and ultimately profits from the devastation.

In Sudan, for example, the peace process is led by the "Quad Initiative"—a diplomatic grouping comprising supporters of competing factions in the war. On one hand, it includes the United Arab Emirates, the primary sponsor of the Rapid Support Forces. On the other, it includes Saudi Arabia and

XINHUA

U.S. President Donald Trump meets with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Washington, D.C. on October 17

Egypt, which support the Sudanese Armed Forces. All are close allies of the U.S. In fact, in every peace process, the "peace" emerges on the back of extreme violence carried out with the military, financial and diplomatic support of Washington and NATO, leaving societies and resistance movements too weak to oppose the terms being imposed on them.

The logic is clear. Each peace process puts a major emphasis on U.S. access to natural resources, reconstruction and infrastructure projects. In the DRC, the peace framework brokered by Trump's envoy Massad Boulos is linked to the Lobito Corridor—a $5-billion infrastructure project funded by the U.S. to transport critical minerals like cobalt and copper from the Congo to the Atlantic for export to the West. Here, the peace is a security guarantee for the supply chain, not the people. The violence serves to clear the land and discipline the labor force; the peace deal arrives to pave the roads for the loot.

Similarly, the Ukraine proposal contains provisions on "strategic resource partnerships" that would open the country's vast lithium and titanium reserves to exclusive U.S. tutelage. The language mirrors the Gaza plan, where "reconstruction" is a euphemism for prime real estate development along the Mediterranean coast, a vision Jared Kushner—a former advisor to Trump and husband of his daughter, Ivanka—openly advanced even as the bombs were falling.

This is the corporate boardroom applied to statecraft. It bypasses the inconveniences of democracy and self-determination, replacing them with a direct management structure subordinated to U.S. business interests. In fact, each peace deal contains a similar governance model, involving the creation of an independent board chaired by Trump himself. Here, the sovereign state is viewed as a distressed asset, and the "peace deal" is the bankruptcy proceeding that strips it for parts.

Most significantly, none of the peace deals brokered by the U.S. actually delivered peace. In the DRC, M23 massacres continued days after the ink dried on the Washington Accord. In Palestine, the bombing of Gaza continues long after the ceasefire, while the stabilization force promised by the Trump plan essentially outsources the occupation to international mercenaries, freeing the Israeli military for other fronts.

This is not a policy failure. Rather, it represents a deliberate strategy that is in many ways the quintessence of the U.S. approach to war, which profits from war and then restructures the battlefield—sufficiently softened by the violence—into a terrain of super-exploitation. This is Washington's business of peace. **BR**

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Why the World Could Not Wait for America

By Einar Tangen

The absence of the United States from the UN Climate Change Conference in Belém, Brazil, or COP30, taking place from November 10 to 21, was more than a diplomatic snub; it was a seismic shift that recalibrated the global order. The decision by the world's historically largest polluter not to attend left more than an empty chair. It left a chasm.

It resulted in a summit filled with the anxious speculation of delegates, the grim calculations of scientists and the determined strategizing of those who have to act.

Varied impacts

For the European Union, America's absence was a source of profound frustration and strategic paralysis. European diplomats were trapped. Their continent was deeply committed to the existential priority of climate action, yet they were tethered to a transatlantic partner that was politically unreliable.

While the official U.S. delegation was absent, over 100 American sub-national leaders—governors, mayors, and legislators—were present. They worked the halls and gave press conferences, promising that a "responsible America" still existed. This created a collegial atmosphere, but it was a thin facade. It highlighted the abdication of responsibility by Washington and the profound failure of its current national elites.

In response, the EU was largely muted. Its leaders, with few exceptions, chose not to condemn Washington forcefully. They feared alienating a crucial NATO ally. This silence is a form of appeasement. It betrays the EU's own proclaimed principles, choosing geopolitical caution over climate leadership. The message is clear: Europe's security fears outweigh its survival instincts.

Critically, the American withdrawal has crippled the old financial engine of climate action. The EU could not single-handedly fill the multi-trillion-dollar gap. The pledge of $100 billion a year to the Global South, already slow, has become a relic of a more cooperative past. The EU's call for "actions, not words" rang hollow when it appeased rather than pressured.

For the nations of the Global South, America's absence is the final confirmation of a bitter truth: Waiting for Western aid is a fool's errand. The promises of the 2015 Paris and 2021 Glasgow climate conferences have evaporated. This realization, while painful, is also liberating. It has forced a necessary and overdue strategic pivot.

The conversation is shifting from begging for aid to leveraging inherent strengths. The old "resource curse," where nations rich in critical minerals like cobalt and lithium have tended to remain poor, has to transition to a "resource benefit." The path forward is not through aid, but through sovereignty. The Global South now realizes it needs to focus on creating its own regional bourses and commodity exchanges. By controlling the pricing and processing of their own resources, they can generate the capital for their own climate adaptation and green industrialization.

America's empty chair is a stark lesson: self-reliance, built through collective actions in regional groupings like BRICS (a group of emerging economies originally consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa—*Ed.*), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), MERCOSUR (Southern Common Market) and the African Union, is the only reliable path forward when the dominant global institutions and powers have chosen to abdicate their responsibilities, even as doing so threatens their own existence.

For 600 years, the world was dominated by colonial powers, which used force and politics to shape the world. China's approach is different. It is civilizational and pragmatic, focused on collective action and consensus.

While some Western media outlets tried to infer that Beijing's unwillingness to take Washington's place was a sign of weakness, for China it's the result of viewing the emerging situation from a historical perspective, seeing America's actions not as a one-off event, but as part of a cycle of irresponsibility. From Beijing's viewpoint, America's "abdication" is not a strategic act, but rather a sign of decline. It is evidence of the erosion of American hegemony, indicating that the U.S. is already an unreliable and unpredictable power. Rushing to take the "vacant chair" on America's terms would be a strategic mistake. It is wiser to be patient and let the contrast between America's and China's actions speak for themselves.

XINHUA

A visitor at the U.S. Pavilion at the UN Climate Change Conference in Belém, Brazil, or COP30, on November 17

China's role

At COP30, China's role was different from the old model of dominant powers. It did not command, it convened, it facilitated. This approach aligns with its vision of a new kind of global leadership, built on key global initiatives on development, security, civilizations and governance that it has proposed to support the emergence of a collective, sustainable and responsible multipolar world order. These are a model of win-win sustainable governance, a direct contrast to the zero-sum "king of the hill" politics of the past.

China has leveraged its diplomatic weight to broker deals and fund green infrastructure through the Belt and Road Initiative (a China-proposed initiative to boost connectivity along and beyond the ancient Silk Road routes—*Ed.*), not just at COP30, but over the last 12 years, putting $1.3 trillion behind its words. It champions "common but differentiated responsibilities," positioning itself as a stable, reliable partner in contrast to the see-saw politics of American governance. This was not a bid for a unipolar hegemony. China is too pragmatic; it understands that global problems require global, polycentric solutions. It has filled the vacuum not by mimicking American dominance, but by fostering a network of interdependencies, acting as a convener, not a conqueror.

The hundred American officials at COP30 gave mixed messages, presenting a microcosm of a nation at war with itself. But the world cannot be held hostage by one nation's internal dysfunction. The abdication of American leadership is an "own goal." It has shattered the old model of global climate governance, making a new one a necessity.

The compelling conclusion from the halls of COP30 was that the era of waiting is over. Regional and multi-aligned groups have to take the lead. BRICS, the SCO, ASEAN, MERCOSUR and the African Union represent the new collective forces required to drive action. They, by necessity, are on a road to establish resource bourses, harmonize green standards and fund adaptation.

The empty American chair was both a catastrophe and a catalyst. It forced the world to look past Washington and discover its own path. The fight for a livable planet was always a global one; now, the initiative to win that fight had finally become multipolar, led by the willing, with or without the United States. A new consensus, built on sustainable cooperation, had begun to take root. **BR**

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A Declaration of Independence

By Lan Xinzhen

When the 20th Group of 20 (G20) Summit opened in Johannesburg, South Africa, on November 22, participating parties not only reached unanimous consensus on the core agenda of the meeting, but also made history as the first G20 Summit to adopt a joint declaration on its opening day. The high efficiency of this year's summit has largely been attributed to the United States and its decision not to attend.

In the days before the summit began, the U.S. Embassy in South Africa issued a statement announcing that Washington would not send officials to the G20 Summit and opposed any outcome document presented as a G20 consensus without U.S. agreement. However, the adoption of the G20 South Africa Summit: Leaders' Declaration on opening day demonstrated that the other leaders collectively chose to move forward despite the U.S. opposition.

The U.S. Government boycotted the summit over what it calls "racial discrimination" by the South African Government against some white South African farmers, using false narrative to influence multilateral activities. The adoption of the leaders' declaration illustrates that multilateralism remains a steadfast commitment of the international community, and also highlights the growing isolation of the United States.

The international community was correct to criticize the U.S. Government's absence from the summit. Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said this year's summit brought together nations representing three quarters of the world's population, two thirds of global GDP and three quarters of world trade, and that the world can handle economic issues without the United States. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said the world is currently undergoing realignment and new connections are being formed, and it had not been a "good decision" for the United States to abstain.

The world is currently undergoing profound changes, with escalating geopolitical conflicts, trade protectionism and bloc confrontation posing serious challenges to global governance. Against this backdrop, the G20 Summit, a major international summit involving both developed and developing countries, as well as major economies from both the Global North and South, has faced considerable skepticism regarding its ability to project a unified message. Without the United States present, this year's summit has demonstrated the mainstream international demand for unity and cooperation. The adoption of the leaders' declaration itself is a powerful signal that, despite profound differences, major economies still believe it is necessary and possible to sit down at the same table for dialogue and cooperation.

The adoption of the leaders' declaration itself is a powerful signal that, despite profound differences, major economies still believe it is necessary and possible to sit down at the same table for dialogue and cooperation

The 122-point declaration adopted at this summit covers topics such as climate action, debt relief and inclusive growth. It calls for greater global attention to the challenges faced by developing countries, such as the financial needs for post-disaster recovery and reconstruction, debt relief and green energy transition. This will inject momentum into the global development agenda, particularly by accelerating the growth of developing countries.

It also demonstrated a commitment to development, placing the development needs of Global South at the center of the agenda and promoting more inclusive global governance. Moreover, it presented a blueprint for the future, setting a framework for action to address common economic, financial, climate and digital challenges. For these reasons, the summit can also be regarded as a powerful response to the question of whether or not global governance has failed. Although the road ahead is still full of challenges, it preserves hope and impetus for the international community to keep cooperation channels open and jointly address challenges during turbulent times. **BR**

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THROUGH THEIR EYES

People from around the world take you on a journey to rediscover China

Toward a Better Future

The UN Climate Change Conference in Belém, Brazil, or COP30, took place from November 10 to 21. In a recent interview with *Beijing Review* reporters Tao Xing and Wei Mingxin, Chinese Consul General in São Paulo **Yu Peng** shared his views on ecological cooperation and cultural exchange between China and Brazil. Edited excerpts from their conversation follow:

***Beijing Review*: Both China and Brazil face the challenge of balancing environmental protection with economic development. In your view, in which specific areas can they deepen cooperation on green development?**

Yu Peng: China has made ecological progress a top priority in national governance. It has simultaneously pursued carbon reduction, pollution control, ecosystem restoration and low-carbon growth, driving a comprehensive shift toward green economic and social development. These efforts have produced remarkable achievements, and great progress has been made in advancing the Beautiful China Initiative (a top-level development blueprint detailing specific targets for a wide range of sectors for the country's green and high-quality growth—*Ed.*).

China has adopted the vision that lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets, highlighting the conversion of ecological advantages into economic strengths to realize integrated economic, social and ecological benefits.

Brazil has also formulated national strategies in environmental governance, energy transition and biodiversity conservation.

Facing common challenges in sustainable development and climate action, China and Brazil, as resource-rich major emerging economies, have partnered to explore new development paths that harmonize economic growth with environmental protection for the Global South.

Looking ahead, the two countries should deepen alignment of development strategies and transform their respective strengths in natural resources and industrial capacity into green drivers of shared development in multiple areas.

One is green transportation. Public buses in major Brazilian cities such as São Paulo are still predominantly fuel-powered, leading to pollution and high fuel costs. There is a strong demand for electrification. During his visit to China earlier this year, São Paulo Mayor Ricardo Nunes struck deals with Chinese companies to procure electric buses, with $100 million in financing from a Chinese bank. There remains vast potential for cooperation in this field.

Then there are green cities. "Waste siege" (negative effects of the accumulation of unmanaged waste—*Ed.*) is a pressing environmental issue for major Brazilian cities. China has advanced waste-to-energy solutions and successful implementation experience. The Power Construction Corp. of China is building a waste-to-energy plant in Barueri in the northwestern part of the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo and more similar projects may follow.

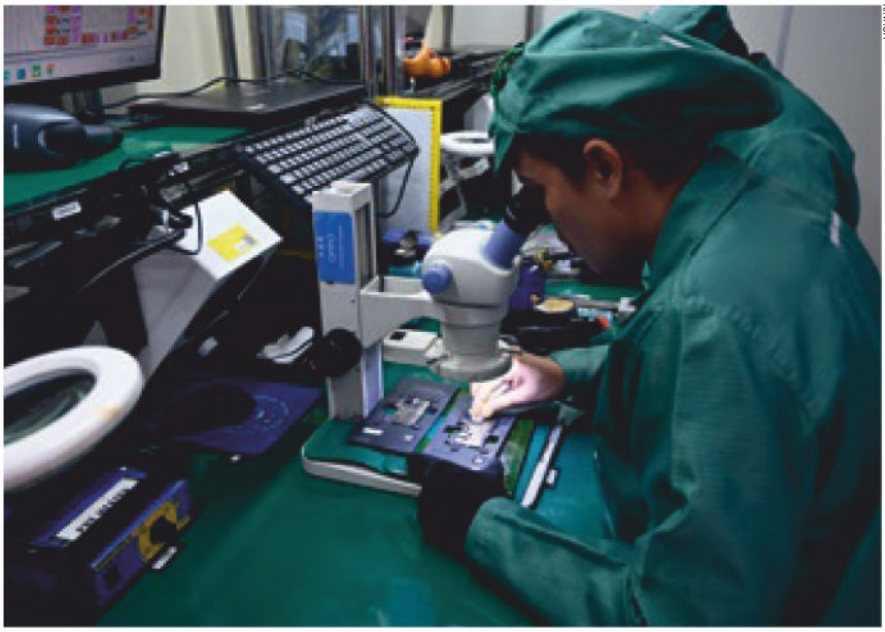
The two countries can also boost green trade. China is the largest buyer of Brazilian soybeans, importing around $30 billion worth of Brazilian soybeans annually, or about one third of Brazil's total exports to China. Chinese importers increasingly value green cooperation with Brazil in the soybean trade. In May 2024, the first shipment of deforestation- and conversion-free (not produced by converting natural ecosystems into farmland—*Ed.*) Brazilian soybeans arrived in China. This is an encouraging step, and both countries are expected to achieve even greater progress in green trade cooperation.

Can you give some examples of China-Brazil cooperation in addressing climate change? What potential breakthroughs lie ahead?

China-Brazil cooperation on climate action is rooted in their shared development needs and a joint responsibility for the future of humanity. Over recent years, there have been many collaborative initiatives that leverage technology sharing to simultaneously improve people's lives and the environment.

China Three Gorges Corp. Brazil has carried out long-term fish-stocking programs in the Paranapanema River Basin, having released about 26 million fish fry altogether. Through joint scientific research and community outreach, biodiversity awareness has taken deeper root locally, achieving harmony between hydropower development and ecological restoration.

The Brazilian subsidiary of China's State Power Investment Corp. has introduced an innovative Drone Plus AI monitoring system at the São Simão Hydropower Plant. The system enables precise management and scientific assessment of vegetation restoration in the reservoir area. This achievement has been shared as a model case at international remote sensing conferences, offering a low-cost, replicable solution for ecological management in large hydropower projects.


XINHUA

Workers perform quality control checks at a mainboard plant of Chinese smartphone maker OPPO in Manaus, Brazil, on May 21

CPFL Energia, controlled by the State Grid Corp. of China, has implemented multiple green initiatives. One of them, CPFL in Hospitals, which provides stable and green electricity to millions of patients, has been recognized by the United Nations as an outstanding sustainable development practice.

Potential breakthroughs in China-Brazil climate cooperation lie in scaling up and systematizing successful approaches. Priorities include: jointly building digital green corridors to expand the use of intelligent environmental monitoring technologies; developing more green finance tools to support clean energy and ecological projects; and using platforms such as COP30 to promote more equitable and inclusive global climate governance rules. Together, the two countries can provide strong support for Global South countries to explore sustainable development pathways.

How has cultural exchange contributed to strengthening mutual understanding and trust between the peoples of China and Brazil? Are there any cultural exchange initiatives that have particularly impressed you?

Civilizations flourish through exchange and are enriched through mutual learning. In recent years, cultural exchanges between China and Brazil have continued to deepen and diversify, enhancing mutual understanding, strengthening the bond between the two peoples and enriching the dimensions of the China-Brazil community with a shared future.

Leading Chinese cultural institutions such as the China National Opera House, the National Ballet of China and the China National Symphony Orchestra have all staged successful performances in São Paulo. Not long ago, the National Ballet of China presented *Chinese New Year*, an original production that blends Western ballet with traditional Chinese festive culture. Its superb artistry and exquisite stage design, as well as joint performances by Chinese and Brazilian dancers, delighted local audiences and demonstrated the growing momentum of China-Brazil cultural exchange.

The four Confucius Institutes in the consular district of the Consulate General of China in São Paulo, with more than 30,000 teachers and students, continue to promote academic cooperation and cultural exchange. The Confucius Institute at São Paulo State University, for example, has already hosted 10 editions of the São Paulo Chinese Film Festival, bringing over 100 Chinese films to local audiences.

Educational cooperation has also flourished. Some of the educational initiatives contributing to the deepening of mutual understanding between the two countries include the establishment of the University of São Paulo's China Center, the successful Study in Beijing exhibition in São Paulo and the signing of an agreement between São Paulo State University, the Center for Language Education and Cooperation under China's Ministry of Education and Hubei University in the central Chinese province of Hubei to jointly build a Chinese language program.

The short video, photography and essay competitions, co-hosted by the Consulate General of China in São Paulo and the São Paulo State Government, have attracted tens of thousands of young participants. This year's essay contest, themed China and Brazil: A Friendship that Crosses Mountains and Seas, received more than 10,000 submissions from students across the state. Their works offered vivid stories of collaboration between the two major developing countries from the perspective of local youth. The heartfelt narratives deeply moved and inspired me, illustrating the enduring friendship between the peoples of China and Brazil.

These deepening exchanges continue to foster mutual understanding and affinity between the two peoples, strengthening the foundations of China-Brazil friendship. Next year will be the China-Brazil Year of Culture. We look forward to taking this opportunity to host even more diverse and dynamic cultural exchange programs, further enriching mutual learning, promoting people-to-people ties and injecting lasting momentum into the long-term development of China-Brazil relations. **BR**

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The Urban Reset

As China's cities shift from breakneck expansion to improving the layout and functions of existing urban spaces, the questions facing policymakers are no longer how to attract migrants, but how to integrate them; not how to build new megaprojects, but how to make cities more livable and inclusive. These themes were front and center at the China Sustainable Urbanization Forum: Theory, Policy and Practice 2025, held at Tsinghua University on November 13, where officials, scholars and industry experts gathered to weigh the challenges facing the next planning cycle and the reforms needed to meet them. Edited excerpts of some participants' views follow:

Bringing two halves together

Wei Houkai, member of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and former Director of the Rural Development Institute at CASS:

After decades of rapid expansion, China's urbanization is shifting into a lower gear.

The share of people living in urban areas took off after reform and opening up began in 1978, passing the 30 percent mark in 1996 and reaching the halfway point by 2010. In the years since, the surge has settled into a slower climb. From 2021 to 2024, during the first four years of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period, growth eased to an annual average of just 0.78 percentage points. (During the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-20), the annual growth rate was 1.31 percentage points—*Ed.*)

Our projections suggest growth will stay around this level through the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) period. By 2050, roughly four fifths of Chinese citizens will be living in the country's cities and towns.

These numbers show a shift to a more measured phase, one in which the priority is less about speed and more about quality. At its core is the steady integration of rural migrants into their urban surroundings.

The principle is simple: Those who help build the city should be able to share fully in what it offers. Rural migrant workers have been indispensable to China's urban boom, but many still struggle to enjoy the same access to public services and opportunities as registered urban residents. The key to narrowing this gap lies in ensuring equitable access to basic public services.

Additionally, difficulties in transferring the management rights for contracted rural land not only prevent rural migrants from fully unlocking the value of their rural assets as they seek full integration into urban life but also hamper the efficient use of agricultural land. Therefore, authorities should consider allowing the rights to be transferred more openly and across wider regions. (Starting in 2014, China began piloting a reform to separate farmland ownership rights, contract rights and management rights. The reform allows farmers to retain the contract rights but transfer the management rights—*Ed.*)

Li Daokui, Dean of the Academic Center for Chinese Economic Practice and Thinking at Tsinghua University:

In the first three quarters of this year, China's real GDP saw a year-on-year growth of 5.2 percent, a rate that would place China among the fastest growing major economies. But nominal GDP rose by 4.1 percent, the lowest since the start of reform and opening up, aside from extraordinary periods such as the pandemic. (The primary difference between real GDP and nominal GDP lies in the fact that real GDP is adjusted for inflation or deflation, whereas nominal GDP is not—*Ed.*)

Many economists reckon that nominal GDP growth needs to return to about 7 percent a year to be considered healthy—and the way to get there is by boosting domestic demand.

Among the many measures available to boost domestic demand, urbanization is regarded as one of the most significant.

To break it further down, roughly half of China's 1.4 billion people now live a fairly modern urban life, with central heating in winter, air-conditioning in summer, high-speed trains for daily travel, and generally higher levels of consumption and living standards.

The other half, however, have yet to fully enter modern urban life. This group can be divided again into two: One half remains in rural areas, mostly seniors and children, with relatively limited spending power; the other half are migrant workers in cities who have not yet fully become urban residents.

To lift national consumption, it is essential to better integrate these 700 million people into the modern urban economy. Expanding their access to jobs, education, healthcare, housing and other public services, as mentioned in the Communist Party of China Central Committee's recommendations for formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan, would unlock a vast reservoir of consumer demand.

From the ground up

Yu Qiang, Director of the Public Services Department at China International Engineering Consulting Corp.:

There are multiple directions in which China's urbanization can proceed. One direction is inward, which involves renewing and upgrading the urban spaces that already exist.

The primary task of urban renewal is to address excess housing inventory and thereby reduce the tightening effects that falling house prices have on the broader economy. Once

the market is balanced, it becomes possible to focus on building quality homes that are safe, comfortable, eco-friendly and smart.

By revamping old residential blocks, idle factories and aging villages that have been enveloped by growing cities, we can use existing housing stock to meet new demand, while simultaneously improving housing quality and strengthening community infrastructure.

Another direction we can pursue is downward, meaning a shift of focus to the county level.

For years, many counties have been locked in a race for higher GDP. Going forward, they need to identify their leading industries and concentrate resources on areas where they hold real advantages. At the same time, policies and evaluations should be tailored to local conditions to avoid pointless competition.

Li Zhi, Assistant Dean of the China Institute for Development Planning at Tsinghua University:

A central paradox in China's urban development lies in the misalignment between its spatial planning and development agenda. While local development plans are revised every five years, spatial planning are typically drawn up over a 15-year horizon, thereby causing a lag in adjusting spatial planning to changing development goals.

Cities vary in their industrial structures, so planning must be fitted accordingly. Moreover, county-level cities, regional centers and megacities each play distinct roles within the national economic agenda. Development plans should therefore be realistic, targeted and aligned with a city's specific position and responsibilities.

Li Daokui:

For decades, local finances have depended heavily on industrial expansion and large projects. This has steered authorities toward the kinds of projects that deliver fast GDP gains and sound fiscal returns.

What gets sidelined, as a result, is the quieter, slower work of people-centered urbanization—reviving idle towns, regrouping hollowed out villages, helping rural migrants integrate fully into city life and improving everyday public services. These efforts matter enormously, but they rarely deliver quick results, which is why they often receive far less weight in current urban development assessments.

To change this, national goals need to be broken down into measurable, enforceable metrics and built into the evaluation system. Only when indicators such as equitable access to basic public services are included in officials' performance reviews will local authorities be genuinely motivated to push reforms in areas like household registration and public service upgrades. Much like students who study harder when exams are looming, officials without clear performance pressures have little reason to take the initiative.

What is equally important is to address local government debt. Over the past two decades, the many infrastructure and urban construction projects have powered fast development. But much of that building spree was financed through heavy borrowing. As a result, many local authorities have amassed a towering pile of debt.

That burden now directly weakens their capacity for urban renewal. Economists call this a "debt overhang," where liabilities are so large that they discourage fresh investment. With a mountain of debt looming over them, local governments naturally prioritize debt repayment, leaving less room for household registration reform, service upgrade and other urban renewal projects that require money upfront.

To break this impasse, the Central Government could consider issuing a tranche of long-term sovereign debt. Part of the funding would help ease local governments' repayment pressures, while the remainder could be channeled into a dedicated fund transferred directly to county administrations to upgrade public facilities and services and support the integration of rural migrants into urban life.

Counties are the main front of China's urbanization. Over the 15th Five-Year Plan period, around 100 million rural migrants are expected to settle in county towns. Supporting their transition to full residency would not only boost domestic demand but also strengthen local finances over time, thereby creating a virtuous cycle in which economic growth and improvements in people's wellbeing reinforce one another. **BR**

COURTESY PHOTO

The China Sustainable Urbanization Forum: Theory, Policy and Practice 2025 underway at Tsinghua University on November 13

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Powering Partnership

State Grid promotes green energy cooperation in Brazil

By Wei Mingxin

The UN Climate Change Conference in Belém, Brazil, or COP30, running from November 10 to 21, delivered advances in both the scale and quality of international climate cooperation. After intense negotiations, the parties adopted a document titled Global Mutirao: Uniting Humanity in a Global Mobilization Against Climate Change, covering issues including climate change mitigation and adaptation, climate finance and international cooperation. The Parties agreed to triple funding for climate adaptation by 2035 and to establish a just transition mechanism (ensuring climate transition is fair and inclusive for all). "Mutirao" means collective efforts. These outcomes have injected fresh momentum into global climate governance and opened broader space for cooperation.

Enhancing climate cooperation is a role that the State Grid Brazil Holding (SGBH) has embraced. A subsidiary of the State Grid Corp. of China, SGBH has been operating in Brazil for more than a decade, not only as a builder of energy infrastructure but also as an active driver of bilateral green cooperation and energy transition.

WEI MINGXIN

Sun Tao, President of State Grid Brazil Holding, a subsidiary of the State Grid Corp. of China

Connecting Chinese and Brazilian expertises

In the face of growing climate challenges, the role of enterprises in energy transition has become increasingly important. "Against the backdrop of energy transition, low-carbon and green development is essential; and above all, we must ensure the secure supply of energy," Sun Tao, President of SGBH, said.

SGBH's green practices are embodied in the ±800 kv ultra-high voltage (UHV) transmission project currently under development in Brazil's northeast. As the largest project of its kind in Brazil's history, the lines being constructed under the project are comparable to a "green artery" that will traverse the country, transporting clean energy over long distances. Chinese UHV technology, known for its distinctive advantages of low losses over long distances, high capacity and minimal land use and environmental impact, is exceptionally well suited to Brazil's vast geography and its distribution of energy resources.

The African proverb, "If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together," aptly captures the spirit of this cooperation. To address grid stability challenges stemming from the large-scale integration of new energy sources, SGBH led the establishment of the Electricity Industry Sharing Alliance (EISA) in November 2024. According to Sun, alliance membership has grown from 14 to over 20 organizations, with a clear mission: "To jointly address emerging risks in new-energy development, share advanced technologies and equipment and study future challenges for the entire electricity sector."

Brazil has a long history of developing its power system, and China, which once learned a lot from Itaipu Hydroelectric Plant's advanced eco-protection experiences, is now a global leader in high-voltage direct current transmission. The overhaul of the Itaipu system, contracted to a subsidiary of State Grid Corp. of China, began in January 2024. "The challenges we face today are those Brazil might face tomorrow. Strengthening cooperation is essential to avoid detours," Sun noted.

This year, EISA celebrated its first anniversary in the China Pavilion at COP30 and released an outcomes report showcasing advances in areas such as renewable energy integration, smart grids and energy storage—offering solutions tailored to Brazil's national conditions.

Cultural connections

Throughout its more than a decade in Brazil, SGBH has not only built energy infrastructure but also promoted the sharing of culture. Sun underscored this commitment, saying "Our market-orientation, long-term operation and localization strategy is not only about business development, but also about fostering China-Brazil cultural exchange."

For 13 years, SGBH has continuously supported the Orquestra Maré do Amanhã project, which introduces music and new opportunities to children from vulnerable

FILE

The UN Climate Change Conference in Belém, Brazil, or COP30, comes to a close on November 22

communities. "This project has enabled local children to find alternative paths of growth, away from firearms, drugs and violence," Sun explained. "In this case, music is more than art—it is a bridge that changes lives."

Another platform for China-Brazil cultural exchange is the China-Brazil Friendship Garden, located in the Rio de Janeiro Botanical Garden. An exhibition in the garden on tea culture, sponsored by SGBH, presents visitors with the history of tea development in Brazil and its significance in Chinese culture. "Many people come specifically to see it, and they enjoy it very much," Brazilian curator Lorrayne Rodrigues said.

In 2026, China and Brazil will jointly celebrate the China-Brazil Year of Culture, and SGBH has already begun preparations, planning to continue telling the story of tea and coffee while launching a series of cultural exchange activities.

"Through these exchanges, we do more than enhancing infrastructure connectivity and technology connectivity—we strengthen people-to-people connectivity," Sun said.

New plan for partnership

During a plenary session held in October, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China adopted recommendations for the formulation of the upcoming 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30). The recommendations call for expanding high-level opening up and forging new horizons for mutually beneficial cooperation. SGBH has laid out a clear roadmap for its activities in the next five years and over the longer term—the company aims to double its assets and profits by 2032, becoming a "world-class energy enterprise" aligned with Brazil's National Energy Plan 2030.

Maintaining openness and pursuing mutual benefit are essential for Chinese modernization. Cooperation offers a more stable international environment for companies like State Grid to advance green energy projects in Brazil and beyond.

In the global effort to tackle climate change, cooperation is the only way forward. Through enterprises such as State Grid, China and Brazil demonstrate how to turn challenges into opportunities and transform vision into action. **BR**

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The Shared Green Dream

Cooperation for sustainable development enhances China-Brazil partnership

By Tao Xing

China and Brazil's shared commitment to sustainable partnership was the key takeaway from the 2025 Connecting Cultures: Brazil-China program, which took place in Brazil from November 10 to 18. The program was planned to coincide with the UN Climate Change Conference in Belém, Brazil, or COP30, running from November 10 to 21.

"Brazil and China have huge room for cooperation in the field of sustainable development, and this collaboration starts with storytelling," Brazilian travel blogger Lipe Camanzano said at a forum titled Planning and Development: Insights and Experience for Sustainable Growth, held as part of the program in Rio de Janeiro on November 18.

The forum was co-hosted by the China International Communications Group Center for the Americas (CICG Americas), Embratur (the Brazilian Tourist Board) and the Confucius Institute at Fluminense Federal University (UFF) in Brazil. More than 50 experts, scholars and media representatives from China and Brazil engaged in in-depth discussions on sustainable development issues and paths for bilateral cooperation at the event.

"Internet influencers from both countries can showcase the ecological beauty of Brazil and China through their lenses and narratives, inspiring public awareness of environmental protection and fostering green tourism collaborations," Camanzano said.

In the days before the forum, Camanzano led a visit by a Chinese media delegation to the Brazilian cities of São Paulo, Foz do Iguaçu and Rio de Janeiro, hosted by Embratur and supported by CICG Americas as part of the Connecting Cultures program.

Strengthening bilateral exchanges

"The deepening of China-Brazil relations is bringing the two peoples closer," Andre Netto, Coordinator of International Markets at Embratur, said at the forum, adding that the Brazilian national tourism promotion organization is actively expanding its reach in the Chinese market.

Netto said he hoped that the Connecting Cultures program would help Chinese influencers learn about Brazil's ecological protection efforts and its sustainable development practices and that their stories would attract more Chinese visitors to Brazil. With next year being the China-Brazil Year of Culture, Embratur is planning more exhibition events, and joint promotional efforts to further strengthen bilateral ties and build a lasting partnership rooted in trust and opportunity.

João Monteiro, Director of the UFF School of Tourism, said at the forum that approximately 76,000 Chinese tourists visited Brazil last year. By showcasing a more vivid picture of Brazil's charm to the Chinese market, there is hope for effectively increasing inbound visitor traffic from China, he predicted.

Meanwhile, about 15,000 Brazilian tourists traveled to China in 2024, showing there's still great potential for growth. "The facilitation of visas and the continued strengthening of bilateral friendly relations will be key to unlocking this potential," Monteiro suggested.

Fabia Trentin, Director of Tourism at Niterói Tourism Co., said at the forum that the government of Niterói, a city in Rio de Janeiro State, places great importance on cooperation with China in tourism, innovation and sustainable development, and eagerly anticipates the arrival of Chinese tourists.

Flávia Souza, Director of the Institute of Arts and Social Communication

CHEN LIWAN

Members of a Chinese media delegation visit the Itaipu Hydroelectric Plant in Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil, on November 13

TAO XING

Influencers pose for a group photo during a visit to the São Paulo Museum of Art in São Paulo, Brazil, on November 11

at UFF, said genuine collaboration involves a deep integration of knowledge, culture and experiences. This includes introducing successful Chinese experiences to Brazil as well as creating a welcoming environment for Chinese students in Brazil.

Vitor Ierusalimschy, Brazilian Deputy Director of the Confucius Institute at UFF, said the institute will actively promote the two-way flow of teachers and students, deepen collaborative projects and continue to serve as a bridge to strengthen the relationship between the two countries.

Shared values

The idea that lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets has long guided China's development path, and this principle has also been validated in Brazil. "Despite being continents apart, both China and Brazil have demonstrated strong commitment to environmental, social and governance (ESG) principles, showcasing their dedication to sustainable development and ecological governance," Camanzano told *Beijing Review*.

Chinese influencers said they were impressed by Brazil's ecological conservation efforts and the economic benefits they generate. For example, the media delegation on November 13 visited the Itaipu Hydroelectric Plant, which has been in operation for over 40 years. It had been the world's largest hydroelectric station prior to the completion of China's Three Gorges Dam in 2009.

"Not just energy" has always been the guiding philosophy of Itaipu. Sergio Angheben, environmental protection manager at Itaipu, shared with *Beijing Review* that the dam not only serves as a power generation facility but also prioritizes environmental protection through initiatives such as reforestation, water quality management and sediment control.

Environmental management at Itaipu has also brought tourism and economic benefits. The plant lies on the border between Brazil and Paraguay and about 900,000 visitors visit the Brazilian side of the dam each year, generating approximately 6 million Brazilian reals ($1.13 million) in revenue, according to João André, tourism manager at Itaipu.

Chinese travel blogger Chang Lin, who participated in the visit, shared her impressions at the forum. She expressed how the reverence for nature of the people of Foz do Iguaçu, a major tourist destination in Paraná famous for the Iguaçu Falls and the Itaipu Dam, and the community restaurants in Rio de Janeiro that "profit by day and aid the poor by night" deepened her understanding of the humanistic care involved in sustainable development. She said she looked forward to taking on the role of cultural ambassador, conveying Brazil's grandeur and warmth to the Chinese audience.

Camanzano mentioned his visit to China last ▸▸

COURTESY PHOTO

The Planning and Development Insights and Experience for Sustainable Growth Forum takes place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on November 18

October and said he was impressed by the ecological environment of Yucun Village in Zhejiang Province and the socio-economic benefits resulting from ecosystem preservation there. Once a dusty mining site, the village has transformed into a lush, vibrant destination that attracts over 1 million visitors each year.

"We have a very similar perspective because we both are very concerned about ESG initiatives," Camanzano said, adding that both countries are doing well in this field.

Sustainable partnership

"China and Brazil share similar positions on upholding multilateralism and improving global governance, and both have made significant contributions to addressing climate change and promoting sustainable development," Xin Feng, President of CICG Americas, said during a video address at the November 18 forum in Rio de Janeiro.

"The two sides should further expand cooperation in emerging fields such as the digital economy, green economy, pharmaceuticals, AI and aerospace, enabling their people to live happier lives," Xin said.

This viewpoint was echoed by Professor Fábio Barboza Passos, Vice Rector of UFF. "China has rich experience in technology and industrial development, and we look forward to further expanding research collaborations with China to drive more innovative outcomes," he said.

UFF has a solid research foundation in areas such as energy transition, sustainable development, biodiversity and new materials, and is actively planning to establish an energy transition research center, according to Passos. He said the university has maintained close cooperation with China for a long time.

Xing Yutao, a professor at UFF Department of Physics, pointed out that Brazil has favorable conditions for developing electric vehicles, with its climate well suited to battery applications and over 80 percent of its electricity coming from green energy. However, the country still lags behind in core technologies like lithium-ion batteries, providing broad space for China-Brazil cooperation.

The recommendations for formulating China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30), adopted at the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee in October, systematically outline China's development blueprint for the next five years, Tian Min, Consul General of China in Rio de Janeiro, said at the forum.

"The 15th Five-Year Plan will provide more opportunities for deepening practical cooperation between China and Brazil," Tian added. "China-Brazil relations are at their best in history, with smooth alignment of development strategies and fruitful cooperation results in many fields. China consistently views and develops bilateral relations from a strategic and long-term perspective and is willing to strengthen exchange of governance experience with Brazil to jointly advance the modernization process." **BR**

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Fast Freight Takes Flight

Robust governance and innovation are key to unlocking the full potential of low-altitude logistics By Ji Jing

In the era of technology rapidly transforming logistics and logistical efficiency becoming a key economic driver, drones are emerging as a game-changing transport technology. Faster than planes, trains and trucks between nearby cities, drone logistics is becoming one of the fastest-growing sectors of the low-altitude economy.

A vital aerial corridor now links Shenzhen and Zhongshan in Guangdong Province. These commercial low-altitude logistics routes, accessible through Weixin mini-programs, enable users to receive intercity items in an average of just three hours.

This route is part of a surge in new intercity routes over the past year in Guangdong, with a robust low-altitude logistics network now forming across the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area—a city cluster encompassing nine cities in Guangdong and the special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macao. Phoenix Wings, the unmanned aerial vehicle arm of express delivery giant SF Group, operates over 1,000 delivery drones daily within the region, handling over 20,000 parcels.

Low-altitude logistics is proving its worth across express delivery, agricultural transport, medical supply delivery and numerous other sectors. Statistics from the China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing reveal that China launched over 140 new low-altitude logistics routes in 2024, with urban routes constituting 90 percent of the total.

The low-altitude logistics industry's market size grew from 27.18 billion yuan ($3.79 billion) in 2020 to 58.18 billion yuan ($8.2 billion) in 2023. Projections suggest this market could reach between 120 billion ($16.9 billion) and 150 billion yuan ($21.1 billion) by 2025, according to the China Low-Altitude Logistics Development Report released by the Linksum Institute of Digital Industry in December 2024.

A burgeoning industry

Capitalizing on these immense opportunities, leading express delivery companies are accelerating their drone business development and pilot projects across many locations are demonstrating substantial progress.

For instance, YTO Express established Shanghai Yuanhang Drone Technology Co. Ltd. late last year. YTO's low-altitude initiatives primarily target last-mile delivery, with ongoing pilot programs in Zhejiang, Sichuan and Hainan provinces.

Another express courier, ZTO Express, has launched an integrated air-ground operations center in Shunde District of Foshan, Guangdong. This hub will manage the assembly of unmanned logistics equipment and intelligent low-altitude transportation scheduling, with ambitions to become a pivotal low-altitude logistics hub for south China.

Yunda Express is also making significant strides in low-altitude logistics. Currently, five Yunda drone routes operate regularly in Zhejiang, serving areas including Jiaxing and Hangzhou cities by delivering medical supplies and fresh produce, including fruit and seafood.

The burgeoning demand for rapid and personalized delivery, fueled by e-commerce and instant delivery, is a significant catalyst for low-altitude logistics, according to Yan Yan, public affairs director for food delivery platform Meituan's drone business.

Li Henggui, who heads the low-altitude economy division at YTO Express, told ThePaper.cn that low-altitude delivery is currently ideal for high-value, time-critical products and for unique circumstances such as hard-to-reach routes, hazardous terrain and remote mountains or islands.

XINHUA

A drone transports oranges in Pengjiapo Village, Zigui County, Hubei Province, on April 14

XINHUA

A logistics drone takes off in Haikou, Hainan Province, on April 14, heading across the Qiongzhou Strait to Xuwen Port in Zhanjiang, Guangdong Province

"Drone delivery bypasses road traffic congestion, making it over twice as efficient as road delivery for time-sensitive goods like hot coffee," Yan explained to *People's Daily*.

Challenges

Despite these advantages, industry experts acknowledge that China's low-altitude logistics sector is still in its nascent stages, facing several critical challenges.

Song Bingzheng, head of product research and development at ZTO Express, highlighted cost as a primary hurdle. The research, development and procurement of high-performance logistics drones are expensive, and the establishment of supporting ground stations, charging facilities and professional maintenance teams further increases operational cost. Song said while ZTO has optimized its cost per deployment to 86.2 yuan ($12), it remains less economical than traditional road transportation.

To address this, Song told ThePaper.cn that some remote areas, with government backing, are developing specialized drone take-off and landing platforms. These operations utilize 100 kg-capacity drones for fixed deliveries, such as to schools. In mountainous regions like Yunnan Province, accumulating package volumes allows drones to deliver within two to three days, greatly reducing the time and effort previously spent on foot. These high-volume scenarios represent some of the most mature applications for low-altitude logistics.

Beyond cost, current drone performance limitations hinder large-scale adoption. Song further elaborated that logistics drones generally struggle with low payload capacity, limited flight endurance and insufficient adaptability to challenging environments like strong winds or low temperatures. Drones with a 5-kg capacity typically have a flight range of only 20 to 30 km, making them ill-suited for cross-regional deliveries.

Incomplete regulations present another major obstacle. Song explained that cross-regional flights necessitate coordination with multi-level air traffic control departments. The intricate approval process for temporary flight routes, lengthy airworthiness certification cycles, and cumbersome procedures for obtaining relevant licenses and permits all constrain flexible scheduling and large-scale drone operations.

Enterprises are increasingly advocating for more open airspace resources. "The pace at which urban airspace is opened and the sophistication of its management directly influence corporate investment willingness," stated Yan. Policies have been piloted to ease airspace restrictions, enabling companies to establish new routes and achieve aerial delivery even within dense urban areas. Yan recommended that regions systematically promote airspace management and flight activity approvals and establish intelligent air traffic management systems to unlock the full potential of low-altitude airspace.

However, the crucial step of opening airspace resources hinges on ensuring an elevated level of safety. "Safety is the lifeline for the development of low-altitude logistics," Dong Zhiyi, chief expert of the low-altitude economy at the Chinese Society of Aeronautics and Astronautics, told *People's Daily*. He advocates for the accelerated development of a prudent and inclusive low-altitude safety governance system, championing innovation built upon a foundation of safety and stability. Many companies are actively enhancing their product designs, incorporating safety redundancy—the deployment of multiple protective measures against specific hazards—to navigate complex environments. On the hardware front, drones are equipped with parachutes for emergency situations, while software innovations include embedded automatic parachute deployment programs and autonomous alternate landing point search functions.

Dong further characterized the low-altitude economy as an industry demanding patient cultivation. He stressed the need for enterprises to adopt a long-term perspective, prioritizing technological innovation, continuous product upgrade and scenario expansion to foster more low-altitude consumption. Simultaneously, he urged relevant government departments to engage in scientific and rational planning and ensure the industry's sustainable, safe and orderly development. **BR**

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The New Silk Road

How China is weaving tradition and innovation into an industry renaissance

By Zhang Yage

"The silk of Suzhou, Hangzhou, Jiaxing and Huzhou are unrivaled in the world; all under heaven draw their supply from it."

So observed the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) agronomist Xu Guangqi in his *Complete Treatise on Agriculture*, capturing the undisputed dominance of east China in sericulture centuries ago. Indeed, for much of imperial history, the Jiangnan region, the area south of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, with its rapid economic development and skilled artisans, formed the vibrant heart of China's silk production.

While as early as the Han (206 B.C.-A.D. 220) and Tang (618-907) dynasties, with the expansion of the Silk Road, both overland and maritime, China's western regions emerged as vital corridors, transporting eastern silk to distant markets across Eurasia. These routes spurred economic growth, fostered ethnic integration and wove China's western regions into a tapestry of cross-cultural exchange.

Today, that historical dynamic is being reinvented. No longer merely a transit zone, west China is fast becoming a silk-producing powerhouse in its own right, a shift accelerated by the national East Silk, West Consolidation strategy, which aims to rebalance the industry by anchoring high-quality silk production in the country's central and western regions.

The initiative seeks to rebalance China's silk industry by leveraging the distinct strengths of its eastern and western regions. In essence, it formalizes a regional specialization: The west will concentrate on the production of high-quality raw silk and the weaving of silk fabric, and the east, long a hub of design, branding, as well as research and development, will focus on turning silk fabric into high-end products.

Shifts and upgrades

The recently introduced strategy is not entirely new. It follows earlier initiatives like Moving Mulberry Farming West and Advancing Silk Production West, which were put forward in 2006 with the aim of shifting raw silk production westward. But what sets this new approach apart is its emphasis on production stability, integration and value adding.

According to the document on the East Silk, West Consolidation strategy released in November by the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) and other related government departments, by 2028, the government aims to build 10 flagship silk companies in the east with revenues exceeding 10 billion yuan ($1.41 billion) each, and establish hubs in China's central and western regions to supply 75 percent of the country's premium silk fabric.

"The goal is to anchor the supply chain firmly in central and west China while strengthening coordination with eastern partners—ensuring sustainable, high-quality growth for the silk industry," a MOFCOM official said at the release of the policy document on November 14.

The industrial relocations are driven by changing production factors, such as higher land and labor costs in east China following its pioneering industrial transformation, Chen Wenxing, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering and President of Zhejiang Sci-Tech University, told newspaper *Sichuan Daily*.

However, achieving coordinated development of the silk industry in China's eastern and western regions is no simple task.

"Silk is often regarded as the oriental soft gold. Silk fabrics carry profound historical and cultural significance, distinct regional characteristics and exquisite intangible heritage techniques," Chen explained.

He further noted that silk weaving and the manufacture of silk products represent a higher-value segment than cocoon and raw silk production, involving creativity in pattern design, color coordination and other aspects of product development. This demands more advanced technology, entails greater difficulty and relies on support from the entire industrial chain.

The powerhouse

This strategic evolution did not occur in a vacuum. It was built upon decades of groundwork laid by the west region including Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and Sichuan Province, where advancements in mulberry cultivation, silkworm rearing, and primary processing have matured to a point where they can now support a more sophisticated and value-added industrial chain.

"Since the launch of the Moving Mulberry Farming West initiative in 2006, central and western regions such as Guangxi and Sichuan have expanded their mulberry growing and silkworm rearing operations, now accounting for over 70 percent of national production. Meanwhile, in eastern regions, rising labor and land costs for downstream processes—including weaving, dyeing and garment manufacturing, have accelerated the impetus for industrial relocation," a spokesperson for the MOFCOM's Department of Consumption Promotion told newspaper *Workers' Daily*.

For instance, Sichuan now supplies the largest share of high-grade silk material nationwide, with 87,000 tons of cocoon output in 2024 and silk material exports worth $170 million.

What makes Sichuan emblematic of the new policy is its ability to merge tradition with innovation.

XINHUA

Workers are engaged in production at a silk enterprise in Xincheng County, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region on November 4. Sericulture has now become a pivotal sector in boosting local incomes

Chen Lin, Marketing Director of Sichuan Antai Cocoon and Silk Group Co. Ltd., said the company is planning to further advance in deep processing fields such as printing and dyeing. "The experience of Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, and other regions in intelligent and digital production lines is worth learning from," Chen Lin told *Sichuan Daily*.

In Gaoxian County, Yibin City of Sichuan, the New Silk Road Cocoon Silk Co. has built a 200-hectare organic mulberry base, combining ancestral farming knowledge with blockchain traceability.

"We're no longer just selling to Jiangsu or Zhejiang," Zhang Yuexin, the firm's deputy general manager, told Gaoxian County Media Center. "Now, 80 percent of our production goes to Europe. Our silk ends up in Italian fashion houses and Romanian ateliers. The world is recognizing what we've always known: Sichuan silk is among the finest."

"The strategy will also generate new opportunities for Sichuan in building a trillion-yuan (more than $100 billion) industry," Wu Jinliang, President of the Sichuan Silk Association, told *Sichuan Daily*. He explained that as more high-quality enterprises, advanced technologies and other resources from the eastern regions accelerate their relocation to the west, Sichuan will further promote industrial upgrading and expand the scale of its industries.

The trend of accelerated integrated development is also becoming increasingly prominent in Sichuan. For instance, the province is speeding up the development of a range of mulberry products, such as mulberry leaf tea and silkworm pupa oil, which can regulate cholesterol or be used as an antioxidant, leveraging innovative products to stimulate fresh consumer demand. Meanwhile, new consumption scenarios and business formats, including silk-themed towns, museums, and cultural and creative bases, are continuously emerging, driving the diversified and integrated growth of the industry.

Just as Sichuan exemplifies the fusion of tradition and technology, Guangxi's Xincheng County offers another compelling model of how west China is revitalizing the silk industry through grassroots innovation and strategic policy support, and attracting coastal investment in the process.

Policy empowerment has been the "guiding star" for this transformation. Xincheng has rolled out specialized plans and disbursed millions in direct subsidies to households, increasing the monthly average sericulture income of supported families by over 4,000 yuan ($563). Infrastructure has been simultaneously upgraded, with the county government attracting investment of over 100 million yuan ($14 million) in standardized silkworm demonstration bases.

The results are tangible. The county's sericulture industry now blankets 130 administrative villages, benefiting 276,000 residents and producing 45,900 tons of fresh cocoons in 2024.

Model innovation has opened new pathways. By utilizing spaces around homes, Xincheng promotes partnerships between leading enterprises, cooperatives and farmers to ensure high-quality silkworm eggs, technical training and cocoon purchase prices 5-8 percent above market rates, forming a closed-loop industrial chain.

What powers Xincheng growth is its rapid technological leap.

"We moved west from Shenzhen to set up here in Xincheng precisely because of its strong industrial foundation—its 17,333 hectares of mulberry fields and 70,000 silkworm-raising households," Wei Yichen, Deputy General Manager of Guangxi Tongyi Guosi Development Co. Ltd., the operator of the Xincheng Cocoon Silk Industrial Park, told China News Service.

Wei is a witness to the industry's transformation. "In the past, sericulture was entirely at the mercy of nature, and the county only had primary reeling processing," Wei explained, adding that the industrial park now also engages in smart silk scouring to remove impurities and smart dyeing. **BR**

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Kuliang Revisited

A China-U.S. co-produced documentary records the enduring friendship between the two countries

By Kang Caiqi

To the east of Fuzhou, capital of Fujian Province in southeast China, stands a verdant mountain known as Kuliang. In the mid-19th century, many international guests settled in the city. Kuliang rose to fame as a beloved summer retreat, attracting expatriates who had made Fuzhou their home. For nearly a century, foreign and local residents lived together in harmony, and Kuliang blossomed into a unique international community where Eastern and Western cultures intertwined.

A history brought to life

Mary Carleton was one of the expatriates. In 1887, after graduating from the College of Medicine at Syracuse University in the United States, under the Methodist Episcopal Church, she arrived in China, where she worked in a hospital in Kuliang, later built a clinic, and adopted a Chinese daughter.

More than a century later, Carleton's descendant Holly Bradsher, a U.S. high school student, learned of this chapter of history from her grandmother. Deeply moved by it, she decided to travel across the ocean to China to trace the footsteps of her great-great grandaunt. Along the way, she formed a friendship with a Chinese girl, Zhou Tianyi, and together they explored Kuliang, visiting places that still bear the many cherished memories of friendship between China and the U.S.

The 50-minute China-U.S. co-produced documentary *Dear Kuliang* tells exactly such stories. It not only revives touching stories of Carleton and other figures connected to old Kuliang, but also captures the journey of contemporary Chinese and American youth as they meet, come to understand one another, lend mutual support and build a deep and heartfelt friendship.

With filming beginning in July 2023, the documentary was released in China on SETV (Southeast Television) on November 10 and was also broadcast on the History Channel in the U.S.

"The production took nearly two years and was filmed at multiple locations across China and the U.S.," Chen Fang, general producer of *Dear Kuliang*, told *Beijing Review*.

Dear Kuliang celebrated its U.S screening, held at Loyola Marymount University and the Consulate General of China in Los Angeles, during the Capture the Moments of Friendship: a Cinematic Record of China-U.S. Relations event that took place in Los Angeles on November 7. The event was one of the highlights of the 21st Chinese American Film Festival (CAFF) and the Chinese American Television Festival. The screenings attracted local university students and faculty, film industry professionals and representatives from cultural and friendship organizations.

Founded in 2005, the annual festivals are held in Los Angeles every November. The Los Angeles County Office has designated November as "Chinese American Film Festival and Chinese American Television Festival Month."

During the festivals, a series of panels convened, bringing together professionals from China and the U.S. to exchange insights and explore avenues for collaboration.

Friendship across the Pacific

Among the many guests participating in the screening, Andrew Morgan, an acclaimed filmmaker with four Academy Awards to his name, is a pioneering figure and advocate for Sino-U.S. co-productions in film and television. He has been actively involved in the production of Chinese-themed projects such as *The Way of the Dragon* (a 1972 film directed by and starred in by Bruce Lee), *Enter the Dragon* (a 1973 martial arts film directed by Robert Clouse and also starring Lee) and *The Warlords* (a 2007 historical action film directed by Peter Chan).

His personal experience of engagement with China represents a microcosm of the broader friendship between the two countries. After the screening, he told Chen that he had a deep connection with Lee. Following Lee's passing, he personally accompanied Lee's wife and two children on their return to the U.S. and assisted in arranging the funeral services in Seattle.

Morgan was also exceedingly generous in his praise for this documentary: "From what I have seen, it is an excellent documentary. It highlights a period of Sino-American relations prior to the founding of People's Republic of China that many Americans are unfamiliar with, and in that regard, it is especially valuable."

COURTESY PHOTO

A poster promoting the documentary *Dear Kuliang*

The friendship between the young Chinese and American protagonists in the documentary left a deep impression on him. He stated that it is very important to strengthen the connections and exchanges between young people in China and the U.S.

"When you start to connect the younger generations in both countries and show the similarities in lifestyle, then they start to feel that they have more in common, and that will overcome a lot of the current political difficulties and misinformation being spread by certain factions here in the West. It helps young people on both sides of the Pacific to realize that, honestly, under the skin, we are all the same, so I hope there will be more documentaries and you continue to bring them to the CAFF," he told participants at the screening.

Also present at the event were other figures who, like Morgan, have been deeply involved in Sino-U.S. film collaboration and industry exchanges, and Bob Underwood, head of the International Committee of the Writers Guild of America West.

"Every story that shows the relationship between people in China and the U.S. helps improve the bilateral relationships. And *Dear Kuliang* tells an especially touching story," he said to Chen.

Underwood himself had visited China many times, but before his first trip, his impression of the country was very one-dimensional. "Americans tend to think all Chinese people are the same—just 'Chinese,' nothing more. It was only after coming to the field that I realized how rich and diverse the geography, landscapes and local cultures truly are. Every time I go some place new in China, I am really taken in by what a fresh, new experience it is," he said.

He also admitted that many American teenagers' understanding of China is no different from what his used to be. With this in mind, he hopes that Chinese and American teenagers can begin engaging with one another as early as possible. "I believe the earlier young people are encouraged to connect with one another, the better—before misconceptions about others can take root," he added. **BR**

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Comments to kangcaiqi@cicgamericas.com

Wild and Wired

Wilderness contest creates viral stars, a booming industry, and debate about its soul

By Yuan Yuan

When Yang Zhaoqin signed up for the second season of the Extreme Wilderness Survival Challenge in the Qixing Mountain Scenic Area in Zhangjiajie, Hunan Province, she had no idea the decision would turn her into an online sensation. A 29-year-old single mother of two young boys, Yang was drawn to the competition partly by the champion's prize: 200,000 yuan ($28,000), double the reward offered in the first season.

She submitted her application in September. Back then, the recently concluded first season had generated little buzz, with only scattered online discussions mostly focused on contestants' survival skills.

The second season, however, marked a dramatic shift. Organizers launched an aggressive publicity strategy—multi-platform livestreaming, intensive short video coverage and frequent updates on contestants and match progress. This continuous, multi-dimensional content output quickly ignited public curiosity about wilderness survival. The show repeatedly trended on social platforms and amassed over 5 billion views across networks, emerging as an undeniable breakout hit.

Among the contestants who reached the semi-finals, several distinctive figures rose from obscurity to overnight fame. Yang, the only woman in the semi-finals, captured overwhelming attention for her unique personal experience and tenacious performance.

From wildness to web fame

Tian Jianbing, General Manager of the Qixing Mountain Scenic Area, explained that the competition was initially launched to boost the profile of the destination. He noted that Qixing Mountain—with its rare karst mesa terrain, cliffs towering 500 to 700 meters high, deep valleys, dense forests and rich biodiversity—offers an ideal natural environment for wilderness survival challenges.

"The outdoor resources here are incredibly abundant, and wilderness survival is an activity that ordinary visitors can also take part in. We hope tourists won't just be spectators—we want them to become future participants," he told China National Radio.

Contestants must survive in the wild with no external supplies, relying only on minimal basic equipment—during the semi-finals, each was provided with just a chopping knife. Their tasks included building shelters, purifying water and foraging for edible plants under extreme conditions.

Yang was the only woman to reach the later stages of the contest, and also became the first competitor to successfully start a fire using the primitive drill method. She had begun practicing the skill back in September, documenting her attempts on her account on Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok.

When the contest began, she weighed 53 kg, but over just 10 days of living on wild mushrooms, berries, edible plants, roasted grasshoppers and murky water, she lost more than 5 kg. Her fingers and lips became cracked and dry from dehydration. On day 36, she writhed in pain from menstrual cramps and broke down in tears, yet still refused to quit.

Amid her rise to fame, her striking eyelash extensions and pink manicure captured attention. She explained that she had the lashes professionally done before the contest, asking the technician to "make them extra durable." She also got gel nails to prevent dirt from accumulating under her natural nails. This distinctive style earned her the online nickname "Cold Beauty."

She lasted 37 days in the contest in total, becoming the longest-standing female contestant. However, during a physical examination arranged by organizers on November 14, she failed to meet several health indicators and was forced to withdraw from the competition. She was admitted to the hospital for recovery, by which point her weight had dropped to just 42.3 kg.

During her hospital stay, she opened an account on the lifestyle app Xiaohongshu, which had attracted over 70,000 followers by November 26. She even livestreamed from her hospital bed to interact with netizens, with each session drawing more than 20,000 viewers.

During these interactions, she expressed that her participation was not just about the prize money but also about challenging herself and proving that women can be equally resilient in the wild. Although she didn't win the 200,000-yuan prize, she earned over 40,000 yuan ($5,600) from other awards within the competition. Additionally, she was invited to become a tourism ambassador for Zhangjiajie.

Another contestant who gained popularity through the competition was Zhang Bolin, known by his online name "Lin Bei." Born in 2000 and hailing from Sichuan Province, he was the youngest contestant this season and a graduate of Chengdu University of Traditional Chinese Medicine. During the competition, his "primitive" behaviors—such as climbing trees while mimicking monkey calls and foraging for mushrooms—combined with his infectious laughter, captured widespread attention.

SCREENSHOT

Zhang Bolin (left) and Yang Zhaoqin, contestants of the second season of the Extreme Wilderness Survival Challenge in the Qixing Mountain Scenic Area in Zhangjiajie, Hunan Province

He skillfully applied his pharmaceutical knowledge to identify edible and medicinal plants like lilies and Solomon's seal to replenish his energy. On the 27th day of the competition, severe salt deficiency led to symptoms like fluid retention and fatigue, but he managed to recover by consuming purslane, crickets and leeches.

During the contest, he also expressed from afar his love for his girlfriend of five years. His social media following grew by hundreds of thousands throughout the competition. On November 14, he celebrated his 25th birthday in the wilderness, with wild yams he dug up himself serving as his birthday meal.

More fortunate than "Cold Beauty," Zhang advanced to the finals, continuing his extraordinary journey in the wilderness survival challenge.

The boom and concerns

On November 21, the Qixing Mountain Scenic Area officially opened registration for the third season of its wilderness survival challenge. The on-site sign-ups saw an overwhelming surge. With the champion's prize this season dramatically raised to 500,000 yuan ($70,000), the competition is drawing wider public attention.

Participants cited a wide range of motivations for joining: Some hoped to lose weight, others were drawn by the thrill of experiencing wilderness life firsthand, while many were attracted by the high prize money or the opportunity to gain online fame and monetize their presence through livestreaming.

The success of the competition has quickly inspired other nature reserves and scenic spots across China to enter the arena. A number of similar wilderness survival projects are now in preparation or have already been launched in various regions.

"We are seeing this niche market become crowded at a staggering speed," an anonymous tourism investment analyst told Shandong-based *Dazhong Daily*. "Homogenization is the biggest risk. When viewers repeatedly see similar survival shows with identical challenges and social media content editing styles, they will quickly lose interest."

He outlined two potential paths forward: becoming a professional sport that attracts elite global survivalists—though this may sacrifice mass appeal—or fully embracing entertainment with celebrities and scripting for faster profits, which risks alienating core fans by abandoning the "hardcore survival" spirit.

Liu Yujing, a special commentator for *Hebei Daily*, pointed out that the true appeal of wilderness challenges lies in showcasing authentic human survival capabilities in nature and promoting practical outdoor knowledge. However, in reality, many competitions have drifted from this essence, devolving into tests of "who can endure hunger the longest" or "who can hold out under extreme conditions."

She warned that when starvation endurance becomes a metric and dangerous stunts turn into clickbait, such events risk slipping into the territory of "self-punishment performance," especially when pushing physical limits is glorified as perseverance.

To ensure the healthy and sustainable development of wilderness survival competitions, she urged organizers to stay true to the original purpose and set clear safety and social media content boundaries.

"First, we must move away from dangerous gimmicks and refocus our criteria on true survival skills and emergency response," she said. "Second, safety can never be compromised for clicks. Our livestreams should prioritize practical knowledge, giving audiences real value." **BR**

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Where History Comes Alive

Exploring the history of Henan Province, home to four of China's eight ancient capitals, offers intriguing insights into the origins of Chinese culture. Running until December 14 at the National Art Museum of China, the Ink Splendor and Cultural Context: Henan Han-Tang Art Treasures Exhibition brings together over 130 precious Han (206 B.C.-A.D. 220) and Tang (618-907) dynasty relics from 12 museums across Henan to trace the historical roots of Chinese civilization. **BR**

(*Text and photos by Wei Yao*)

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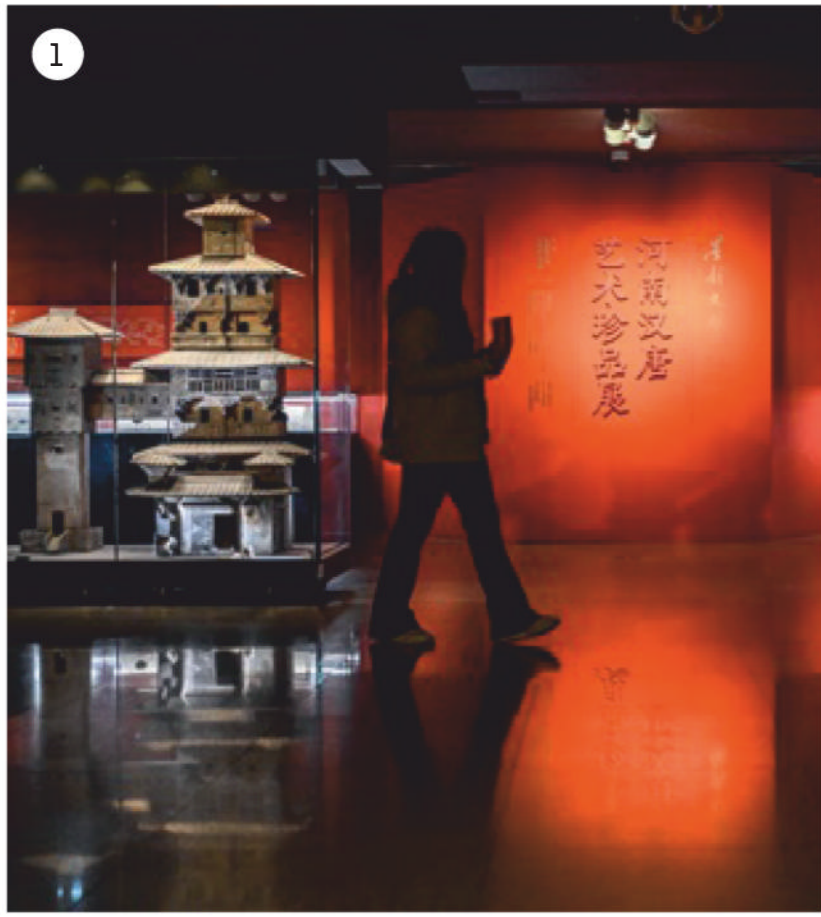
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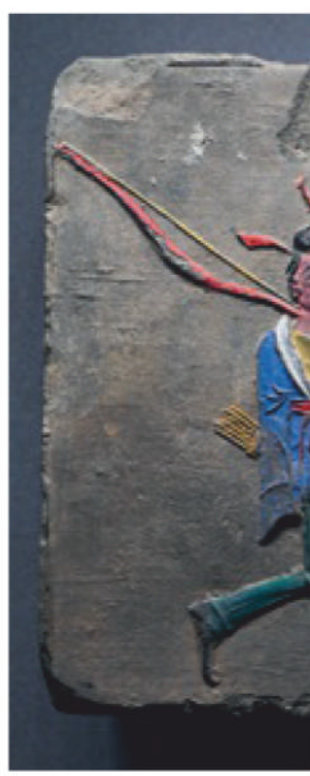

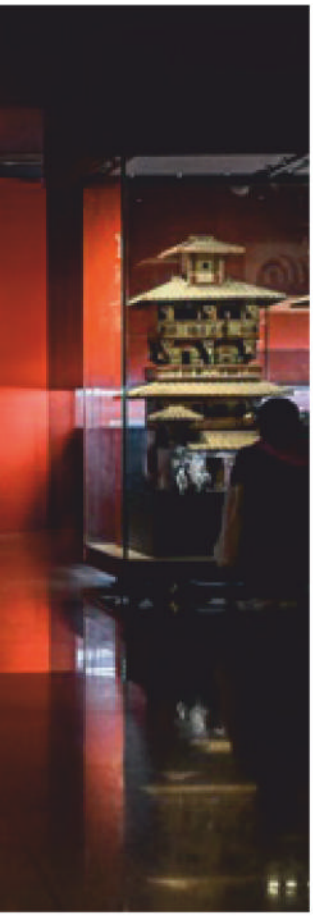

1. Han Dynasty ceramic storage towers from the Jiaozuo Museum in Henan on show at the exhibition. These funerary objects are meticulously crafted as miniature models of real-world storage facilities

2. Han Dynasty ceramic dogs, often found in burial sites, demonstrate the close relationship between humans and dogs in ancient China

3. A Southern Dynasties (420-589) colored brick carving depicting warriors, from the Nanyang Museum

4. A Tang Dynasty jar decorated with a tricolor pearl and stripe pattern, from the Luoyang Museum. Luoyang was the capital of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220). It was also one of the two capitals of the Tang Dynasty, the other one being Chang'an, now Xi'an, Shaanxi Province

5. A Han Dynasty pottery jar from the collection of the Jiaozuo Museum

China's Digital Heart

By Ayesha Rasool

My story in China began with a heartbeat of panic at a Chengdu airport. I was alone, a Pakistani girl surrounded by a language I didn't understand. Then I saw it: not just a new country, but a new world. Digital boards flickered with elegant Chinese characters, people tapped their phones to glide through gates and silent elevators whisked everyone away. I stood there, a computer science student finally seeing a smart city come to life.

That first night, my rescue came from a kind senior from University of Electronic Science and Technology of China (UESTC). He called a car through an app. When we reached the university gate, he simply swiped his phone. A soft beep, and the gate opened. That small, silent action struck me deeply. This digital life wasn't a feature here; it was the foundation.

That magic soon became my everyday rhythm. I used Alipay to rent bikes, feeling the Chengdu breeze on my face and I used Weixin Wallet to split the bill for loud, laughter-filled hotpot dinners. When Chengdu's weather turned cold, I discovered Pinduoduo. Laughing with my roommate as we joined a group buy for a jacket, I found community and joy.

But not every day was smooth. The language barrier often felt like a solid wall. I'll never forget the day at Paradise Mall when I desperately needed eggs. I stood at the counter, my vocabulary failing me. I clucked like a chicken, flapping my arms gently. The shopkeeper's initially confused frown melted into a chuckle. Finally, a kind customer said the magic word *dan*. I learned my first practical Chinese word from a moment of shared, humble laughter.

That's when Baidu Translator became my silent best friend. I used it to get my first haircut in China, the barber and I sharing smiles as the robotic voice translated my request. I used it to buy groceries, holding my phone up to a shopkeeper. Slowly, these digital interactions taught me *nihao* and *xiexie*. Technology taught me how to connect.

My most cherished memory is the celebration of my friend Suity's wedding. Her husband was in South Africa, so the Nikah was held online. The night before, we embarked on a mission. Five girls on bikes, riding through a pouring Chengdu rain, laughing and shivering. We were utterly soaked, but the shared purpose was becoming a core memory.

The next day, we found the perfect suit. On the day of the Nikah, with Suity on my bike, we rode to a Pakistani restaurant. We sang wedding songs, our voices mixing with the city's sounds. Inside, we gathered around a screen. As Suity saw her husband's face, tears streamed down her cheeks, and ours too. I was witnessing love, spanning continents, enabled by a digital world compassionate enough to connect human hearts.

Through it all, the digital heartbeat of China has been my constant companion, but it's the human warmth that gave it meaning. I've danced with elderly Chinese women around a crackling fire, their smiles warmer than the flames. I've navigated night markets, feeling completely safe thanks to a smart city that cares.

China's digital development was never about cold technology. It's about the warmth of a noodle vendor's patience. It's about the freedom a bike app gives a homesick student. It's about shared laughter in the rain. It's a heartbeat, a steady rhythm of connection, safety and belonging that made this Pakistani girl feel that Chengdu had a place built just for her. **BR**

COURTESY PHOTO

Ayesha Rasool on campus at UESTC

The author is a Pakistani pursuing a master's degree in computer science at UESTC in Chengdu, Sichuan Province.
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